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## Nuts and Bolts, Presentation

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# Nuts and Bolts

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# Contents:

Passive/Active voice

Professional, academic tone

Subject-pronoun agreement

Commas and semi-colons

Parallel structure

Split infinitives

Subject-verb agreement



Graduate Writing Center

Naval Postgraduate School

## What is the difference between the passive and active construction?



“The device was tested to ensure that stakeholder requirements were fulfilled.”

“The researchers tested the device to see if it fulfilled the stakeholder’s requirements.”

Examples from “*Insight Style Guide*,” by Bob Kensley, Andrew Cashner, and Chuck Eng (2011, 7)

## A stylistic criticism of the passive voice...



“Passives are generally weak because they place emphasis on the thing done rather than the doer. ‘The battle was won by the Marines’ is a flabby way of saying, ‘The Marines won the battle.’ ‘I love you’ is far more likely to get results than ‘You are loved by me.’”

Argus Tresidder, Former Professor of English, MCDEC, Quantico, quoted in *The Naval Institute Guide to Naval Writing* (Shenk 2009, 230)

## A more substantive criticism of the use of the passive voice...



“We find an overabundance of the passive voice in sentences created by self-protective business interests, magniloquent educators, and bombastic military writers (who must get weary of this accusation), who use the passive voice to avoid responsibility for actions taken. Thus "Cigarette ads were designed to appeal especially to children" places the burden on the ads — as opposed to "We designed the cigarette ads to appeal especially to children," in which "we" accepts responsibility.”

The Guide to Grammar and Writing. The Passive Voice.

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/passive.htm>

## Practice editing these from Passive to Active voice

- The books were checked out. (hint is underlined)  
What is missing?  
Who checked out the books? The actor is missing.  
Sample answer: Patrons checked out the books.
- In defining boundaries, the physical, functional, and behavioral concepts of the issue were explored.
  - Some possible actors: researchers, team members, students, this writer, instructors.
  - Sample answer: Team members explored the physical, functional and behavioral concepts of the issue in defining boundaries.

## Continued....

- Physical decomposition was then applied to the design alternatives to understand the breadth of each design and allow functional analysis.
  - Researchers applied physical decomposition to the design alternatives to understand the breadth of each design and **to** allow functional analysis.
  - Applying physical decomposition to the design alternatives to understand the breadth of each design and **to** allow functional analysis is the best next step.
  - This example shows how you can revise passive voice without using an actor which often leads to the temptation to use first person (“I”, rather than “researchers”.)



## Continued....

- The original problem statement was redefined based on tradeoff analysis in an attempt to meet the needs as well as the wants of the stakeholders. (hint is underlined)
  - I redefined the original problem statement based on the tradeoff analysis in an attempt to meet the needs as well as the wants of the stakeholders.
  - How can we avoid using “I”?
  - Meeting the needs and wants of the stakeholders requires redefining the original problem statement based on the tradeoff analysis.

## Continued....

This example has a second, unmarked passive verb construction. What is it?

- From this analysis, a proposed solution was chosen and architectural design was completed.
  - was completed
  - This analysis led to a proposed solution and completion of an architectural design.
  - From this analysis, researchers proposed a solution and completed an architectural design.
  - Choosing a solution and completing an architectural design followed from this analysis.

Continued....

- Testing and validation of a calcium rich diet has already been proven by the National Osteoporosis Foundation (National Osteoporosis Foundation, 2011).

What is the passive verb here?

**has** already **been proven**

In this example, we see the actor –who is it?

the National Osteoporosis Foundation

The National Osteoporosis Foundation already proved the testing and validation of a calcium rich diet.

Continued....

- In order to assist in identifying the limitations and constraints of this problem, an Input-Output Model (Figure 2-1) was developed to help scope and bound the problem.
- *There is a common example of wordiness in this. Can you find it? This type of wording happens when the author is trying to be polite, but being blunt is OK. Just say what you need to say.*
  - The Input-Output Model (Figure 2-1) helps scope and bound the problem assisting in identifying the limitations and constraints of this problem.
  - The Input-Output Model (figure 2-1) helps scope and bound the problem. This model assists in identifying the limitations and constraints of the problem.

# Jargon, slang, trite, idioms



- Consider your audience
- Examples: vice,
- someone in the know;
- companies with a good reputation will stick around

# continued



- think outside the box;
- he red-lined the item;
- I got the big picture;
- grass doesn't grow under your feet;
- that's the way the cookie crumbles;
- more????

# Can you rewrite these?

- Lastly, the engineers can quote the code of Ethics and uphold their integrity in sticky situations where their moral values might be compromised.
  - Replace “sticky” with “challenging” situations

# Continued...

- Ethics encompasses the moral responsibility of a professional person in the know or in a position of power to others.
- What is the colloquial expression we want to eliminate? This sentence needs significant rewriting. What do you suggest?
  - in the know
  - Applying the code of ethics is the moral responsibility of a professional person.



# More on rewriting what is too casual

- If this is done in a dishonest way, there could be several less than desirable results.
  - Less than desirable/ replace with undesirable results
- The establishment of ethics in a group or a team is one of the principles that holds that team together and makes them better (whether they know it or not).
  - (whether they know it or not)
  - Just delete the part in parentheses.
  - I think of these sorts of things as emoticons.

# Continued...

- Lack of ethics can cause anger, distrust, and ultimately a less than desired product.
  - Less than desired
  - This sentence is vague. Can you improve it?
  - Lack of ethical conduct producing a product can cause public anger, distrust and ultimately a product liability case to defend.

# More trite, slang or colloquial expressions to rewrite

- It is critical that engineers have critical thinking skills to think outside the box.
  - outside the box
  - generate original ideas.
- Multiple polarizing topics come to mind when thinking about ethics in engineering such as the invention of the atomic bomb or the use of nuclear power.
  - come to mind change to “occur”

# Note quote marks

- It is easy to imagine that if an engineer always did things “by the book” that there would be no need for strong ethics in the workplace.
  - Avoid using quote marks to draw unnecessary attention to word; writers often use parentheses to add unnecessary additional ideas or those that should be incorporated.
  - “by the book” replace with
  - properly
  - professionally

# Their



- What's wrong with this word?
- Why?
- Avoid choosing male or female
- This is a subject-pronoun agreement issue. What do we mean by “agreement”?

Can you rewrite this to repair the agreement and colloquial issues?

- As an engineer, one must consider their designs, discoveries, and inventions in a good versus evil manner.

- Their becomes his or her; choose one. “good versus evil manner” is too casual.
  - As an engineer, one must evaluate her designs, discoveries and inventions weighing potentially harmful and beneficial consequences of their use.

# How many?



- Everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, no one, nobody, anyone, anybody...
  - These are grammatically singular so need to match with a grammatically singular verb or pronoun.
  - Singular pronouns: he, she, it, I, me, my, mine, his, him, her, she
  - Singular verbs often end with “s” such as: gets versus get, reads versus read, studies versus study

# Examples

- Everyone needs to bring \_\_\_\_\_ lunch to class.
  - Everyone needs to bring a lunch to class.
  - Everyone needs to bring his lunch to class.
  - Everyone needs to bring her lunch to class.
- Everybody must turn in \_\_\_ exam before noon.
  - Everybody must turn in an exam before noon.
  - Everybody must turn in her exam before noon.
  - Everybody must turn in his exam before noon.



# Examples

- Nobody \_\_\_ any sleep while a NPS student.
  - gets or get?
  - Yes, “gets” is more natural and is singular.  
“Nobody” is singular.

# Transitions/conjunctive adverbs and proper punctuation



- **Conjunctive adverbs:** However, moreover, furthermore, nevertheless, therefore, on the other hand, meanwhile; consequently, also, thus, besides, accordingly. **Transitions:** for example, that is, namely
- Subject+Verb; **transition**, Subject+Verb
- **Independent clauses** joined by these transitions punctuated with semi-colon and comma.
- The key is determining if the words before the transition and the words after the transition are EACH able to stand alone as a sentence (i.e. are independent clauses). If so, use a semicolon and then a comma on either side of the transition. If not, using both commas, not a semi-colon and comma, is often correct.

# Examples

- Everyone brought his lunch to class; therefore, we will work on the project without stopping.
- The team had expected the speed test results to favor a new design; moreover, the new design led to manufacturing cost savings.
- The team had expected the speed test results to favor a new design; on the other hand, the new design led to exorbitant manufacturing cost.

# More examples-you punctuate

- The team had expected the speed test results to favor a new design namely a smaller fin reduces friction and increases speed.
- .... new design; namely, a.....
- The team had expected the speed tests results to favor a new design namely a smaller fin.
- .... new design, namely, a....

# Conjunctions and proper punctuation



- for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. (FANBOYS)
- Subject+Verb, **conjunction** Subject+verb
- Only use a comma before the conjunction.
- The same key test applies here as it did for transitions. If the words before the conjunction and the words after the conjunction can each stand alone as a sentence, then you **MUST** put in a comma before the conjunction.
- Lacking two independent clauses, do not put in a comma. This is the most overused instance of commas.

# Examples

- I brought my lunch to class, and everyone else brought dessert.
- We brought casserole lunches to class, but no one brought utensils.
- We brought casserole lunches to class but no utensils.

# You punctuate:

- The plane crashed because engine number two blew a gasket or the flaps got stuck causing a stall.
- .... a gasket, or the flaps
- Engine number two failed so the pilot feathered the propeller and disengaged auto pilot.
- ...failed, so the pilot ....
- Engine number two failed for the hydraulic system leaked . (for=because—it is rare)
- The pilot feathered the propeller and disengaged auto pilot so that the plane wouldn't crash.
- No comma because it is so that, not just so

# Introductory words, phrases and clauses



- Introductory words, phrases and clauses need to be followed by a comma.
- This is probably one time when reading aloud will give you pause and a cue to place the comma.
- Failing to punctuate is most likely failure to proofread carefully. It is not that you do not know the rules or to insert the punctuation.



# Can you find the introductory word(s)?

- In the end it will drive ship owners to construct more robust tanker designs in order to prevent another incident.
- In the end, it....
- If this is done in a dishonest way there could be several less than desirable results.
- If this is done in a dishonest way, there...
- If ethics is compromised it may be at the cost of one or both of these attributes.
- If ethics is compromised, it...

# continued

- Finally the tests were complete so that we could write up our results and finish the project.
- Finally, the...
- Alternatively there is a new design that will be produced next year.
- Alternatively, there is...
- On September 11, 2001 our world changed forever.
- On September 11, 2001, our....

# More...

- If she would stay on task our team could finish the project.
- If she would stay on task, our....
- When the delivery arrived no one was there to retrieve it.
- When the delivery arrived, no one...
- Regardless of how many tests they conduct on that design it is certain to fail because it is missing a rudder.
- Regardless of how many tests they conduct on that design, it is....

# Parallel Structure



- Problem often shows up in lists
  - Researchers listed the device requirements:
    - ✓ Travel smoothly
    - ✓ Respond rapidly
    - ✓ Drives easily
    - ✓ ....opps what was wrong with the last one?
- Problem also shows up when omitting “to” when it had been used before. We saw this in slide 7
  - Researchers applied physical decomposition to the design alternatives to understand the breadth of each design and **to** allow functional analysis

# Where is the missing “to” or “in”

- As engineers, we have a responsibility to uphold these ethics in order to maintain safety and objectivity and be able to think critically in order to meet public obligations.
  - to be able to think critically.....
- The importance of engineering ethics can be seen in history and our daily lives and should ultimately prioritize safety and social responsibility over political or financial gain.
  - in history and in our daily lives...

# Split infinitives



An ‘infinitive’ is the word ‘to’ plus the verb.

to design; to run; to examine; to care;

Problems arise when words that define the main verb seem very important to us and we keep it next to that verb instead of letting “to” stay next to the verb where it belongs.

# Can you find the Split Infinitive?

- Two major roles of ethics in engineering are an engineer's moral obligation to design safe products for the user as well as an obligation to not steal the intellectual property of others.
- ...an obligation not to steal
- “...it may allow the designer to instantly determine if....”
- “...it may allow the designer to determine instantly if....”

# Subject-Verb Agreement



- Using prepositional phrases often makes choosing the right pronoun difficult so that you have proper subject-verb agreement.
  - One of my professors always \_\_\_\_\_ coffee.
  - Spill/spills
  - His/her/their
- One of my professors always spills his coffee.



# Can you get it right?

- Several of the planes and one helicopter \_\_\_\_grounded today. (is/are)
- are
- All of the children \_\_\_\_\_ well together. (play/ plays)
- Play
- One of the children \_\_\_\_\_ when mom leaves. (cry/cries)
- cries

# None—singular or plural?

- It can be either.
- It is singular with a mass noun such as “water”
- None of the water is potable.
- It is singular when it means “not one”
- I graded all the papers, and none deserves an “A”

# None- singular or plural?

## continued

- It is plural when there is a sense of plurality. Chicago Manual of Style, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. page 290 says to look to the verb that follows for determination. It gives these examples:
- None of the building **WAS** painted.
- None of the guests **WERE** here when I arrived.
- Yet, that reference does say using singular is correct, too.
- None of the edits **WAS** accepted.

# Pet Peeves and more...



- Etc.
- You/Your/Me/My/ I/We when not absolutely necessary.
- Hyphenating two word adjectives
  - single-hull tankers (not single tankers, not hull tankers, but single-hull tankers. You need both words linked to describe the tankers)
  - Twenty-three year old Lt.
  - “Decision-makers” appears often in military writing and is an example of a need for hyphenating that often gets missed.
    - ✦ I am preparing this report for the decision-makers.
    - ✦ Many other technologies have far-reaching consequences.

## Pet Peeves continued..



- Putting “special” words in “quotes” because you need to “notice” them.
- Using parentheses unnecessarily to escape properly rewriting the full idea.

# Several blunders...

- Ethics in engineering encompasses thinking about how your actions when creating, planning, etc. affects the environment, to include people
- Ethics in engineering encompasses thinking about how **your** actions when creating, planning, **etc.** affects the environment, **to include people**

# Can you improve these?

- As responsible engineers **we** must have the **moral fiber** to say that **we fell behind** and are unable to complete a project on **timeline** rather than skipping critical steps or rushing tests.
- Responsible engineers must have the courage to admit falling behind schedule, request an extension, and complete critical steps and tests.

# continued

- As we continue to push the limits of science and technology engineers are consistently challenged with creating new systems utilizing new ideas.
- As **we** continue to **push the limits** of science and technology, engineers are consistently challenged with creating new systems utilizing new ideas.
- As engineers continue to challenge the limits of science and technology, they are required to create new systems utilizing new ideas.



# What about ending with a preposition? What else is wrong?

- A weapon of this magnitude was needed to prevent further escalation of global war but it was also going to do great damage to the nation it was to be used on.
- A weapon of this magnitude **was needed** to prevent further escalation of global war, but it was also going to do great damage to the nation it was to be used **on**.
- This war needed a weapon of this magnitude to prevent further escalation of global war, but it was also going to do great damage to the nation on which it was used.

Thank you for your attention!