Writing for Professionals:

Choosing the Best Style for your Content, Context and Audience

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Writer/Editor/Consultant

fine lines COMMUNICATIONS

What resources are available to me?

How do I *connect* with my readers?

Where do I start?

Grammar
STYLE
CONSISTENCY
CONTEXT
STRUCTURE
Formality
Interpretation
Usage

How is our language changing?

New words are being added to our language:

Blog E-zine Ringtone Voicemail

Old words have new meaning:

Tweet Friend Avatar Sick

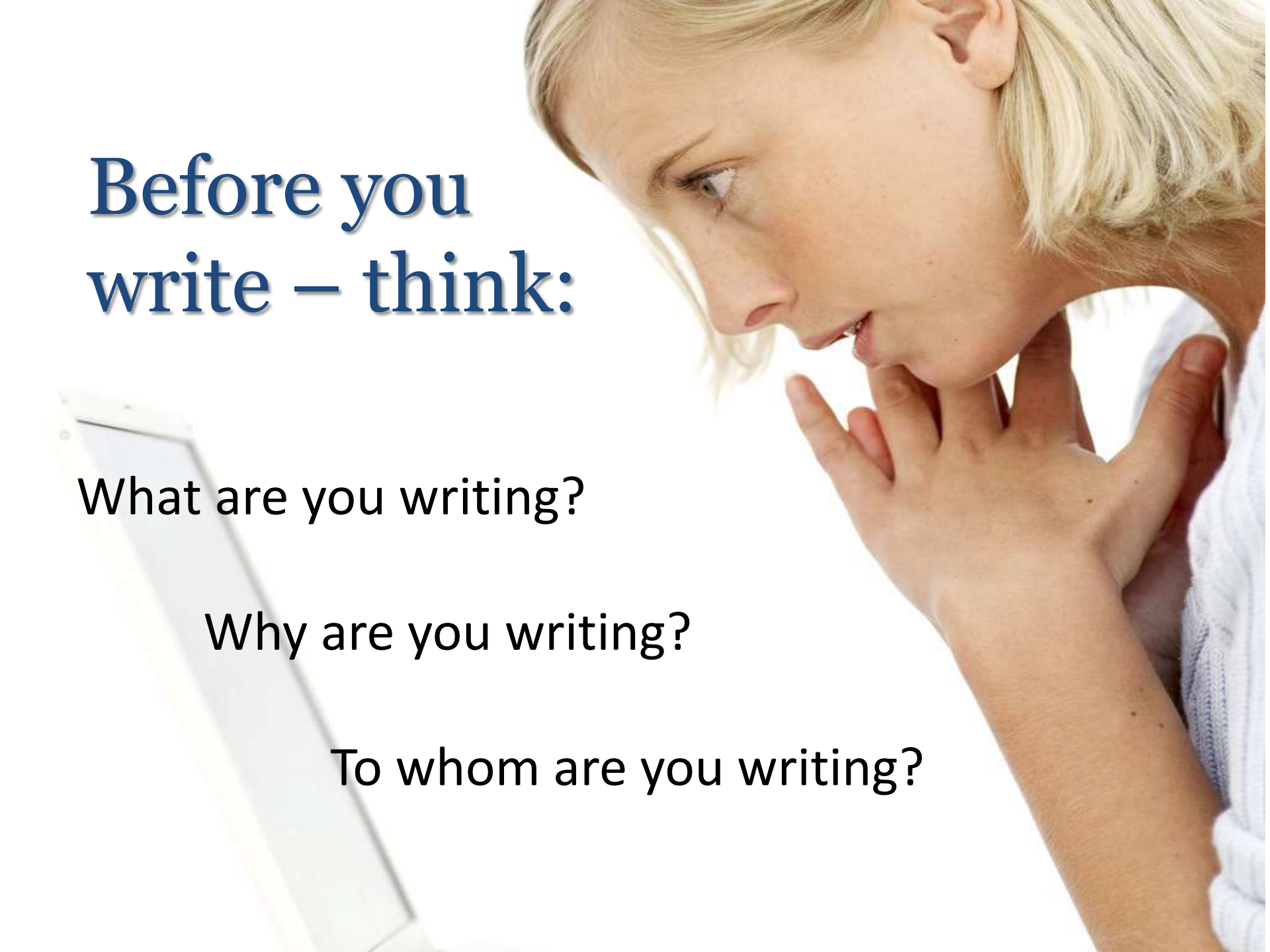
And individual words are changing:

Web site ⟹ website

Grammar vs. Style

Grammar	Style
The “mechanics” of writing	The “voice” of writing
Includes punctuation, spelling, subject-verb agreement, tense, etc.	Includes such things as voice, formality, word choice, etc.
Less subjective	More subjective
Can be taught	More individual interpretation

Before you write – think:



What are you writing?

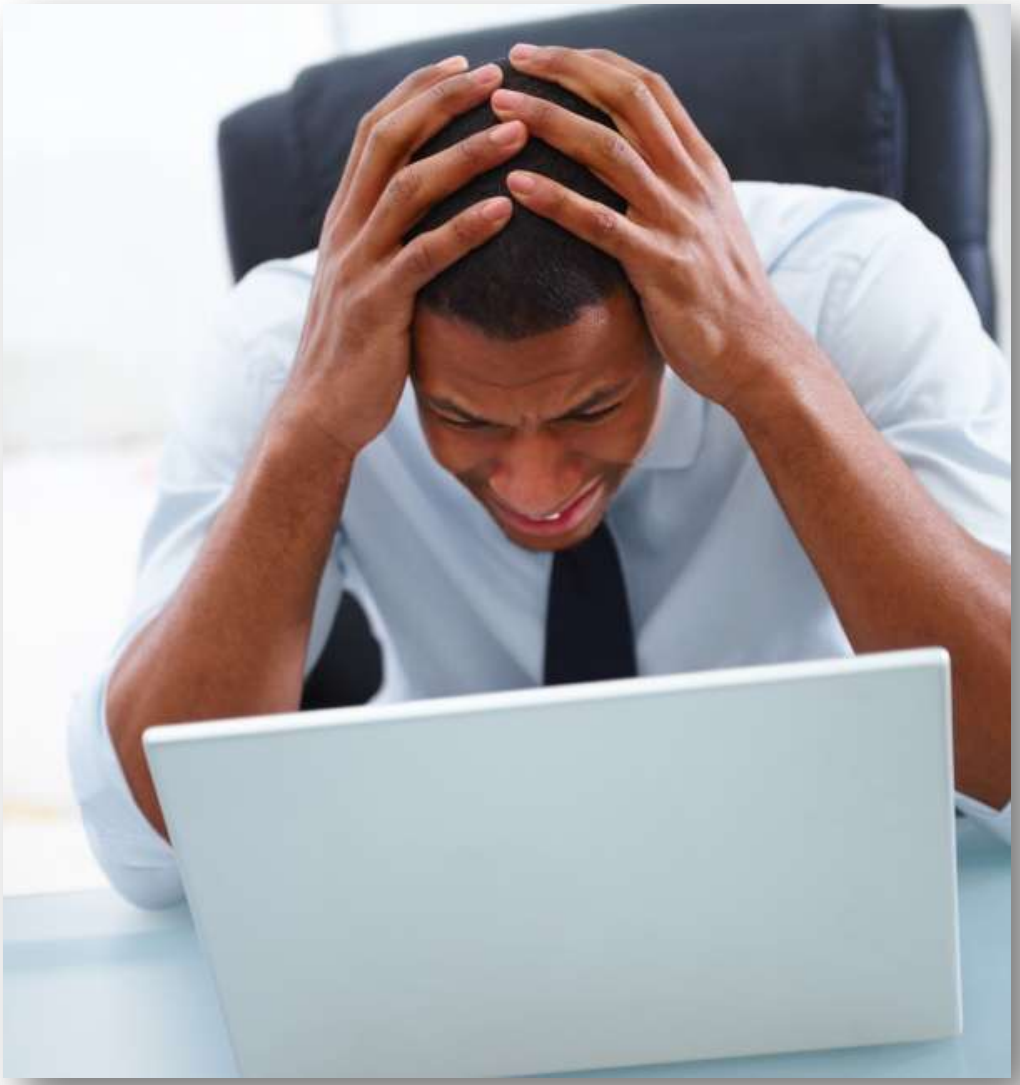
Why are you writing?

To whom are you writing?

“How do I connect with my readers?”

What Are You Writing?

“I have to write a newsletter…”



- I’m writing my company’s monthly e-newsletter.
- I want to inform my clients of current trends and changes in the business, and remind them of upcoming events. This will reinforce my brand in their minds and position me as an expert in my field.
- The newsletter will go out to existing clients who are familiar with my business, as well as potential clients who may not be.

Why Are You Writing?

To educate?

To entertain?

To persuade?

For whom are you writing?

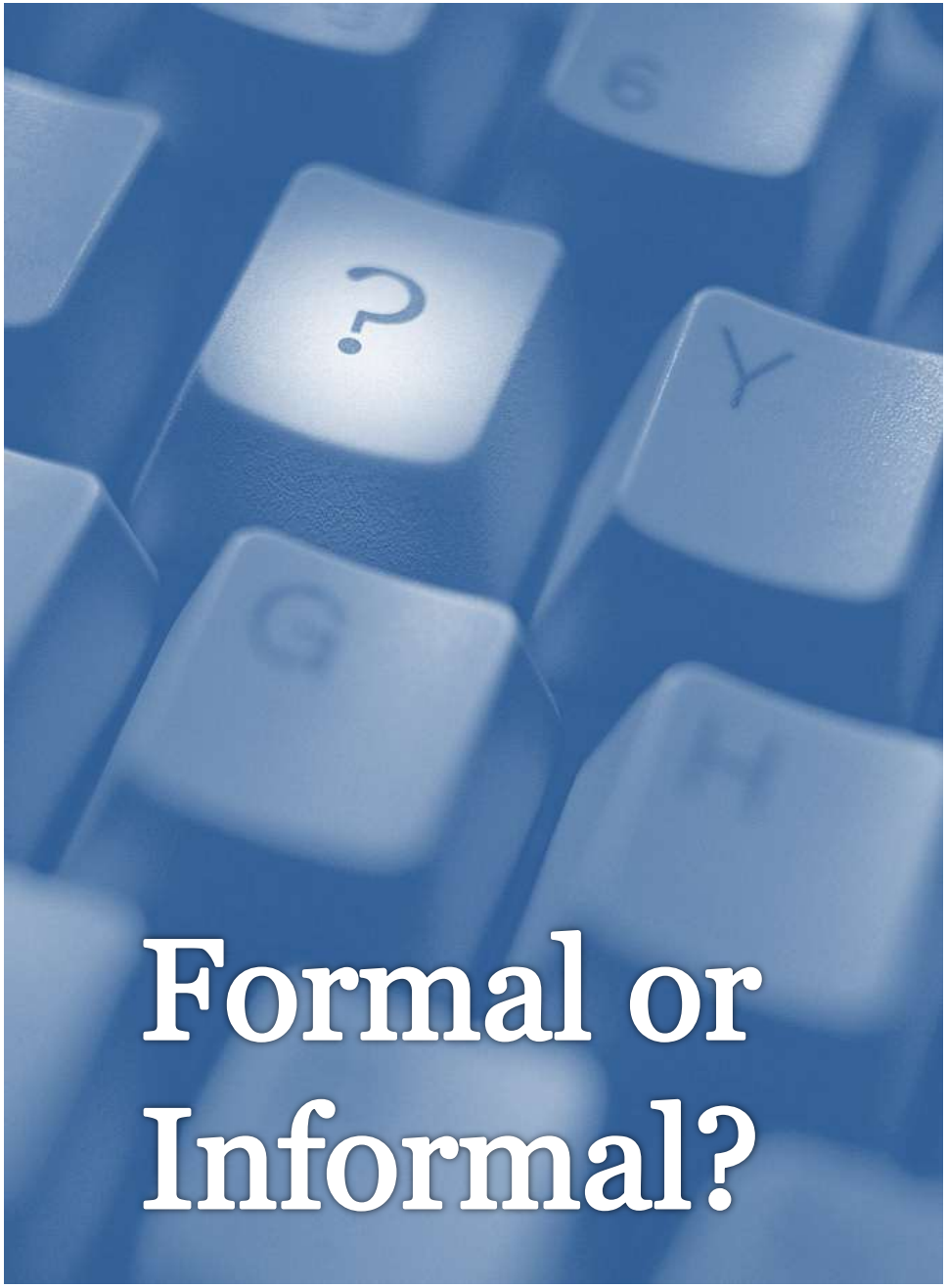
Create a profile of your audience:

- What do they do?
- How old are they? Gender?
- Where do they live?
- How familiar are they with my business? My topic?

Why are they reading?

- Are they reading for pleasure? For information?
- What are they expecting to learn?
- How will they use this information? Will they reuse or "repost" it?
- Are they reading because they *want* to or because they *have* to?

What Makes Writing Formal or Casual?



- The subject
- The audience
- The platform
- Geography
- Writing styles
  - Narrative
  - Passive/active voice
  - Contractions
  - Jargon/slang/buzz-words
  - Abbreviations
  - Sentence length

The Narrative Point of View

Narrative	Point of View	Genre Examples
First Person	I, we	Blogs, correspondence, creative
Second Person	You	Correspondence, blogs, websites, procedural, mar-com
Third Person	Them, him/her	Business formal, academic, journalism, mar-com

Active vs. Passive Voice:

Active voice puts the sentence in logical order:

Elizabeth ate the last cookie.

Subject → Verb → Object

In the ***passive*** voice, the ***object of*** the ***action*** becomes the ***subject*** of the ***sentence***.

"The last cookie was eaten by Elizabeth."

What Else Affects the Level of Formality?

- Contractions

  Can't, doesn't, you're, it's, won't, etc.

- Jargon

  Industry-specific terms

- Abbreviations

  Ave., Feb., info.

- Gender-specific terms

  Waitress, box-boy, mailman

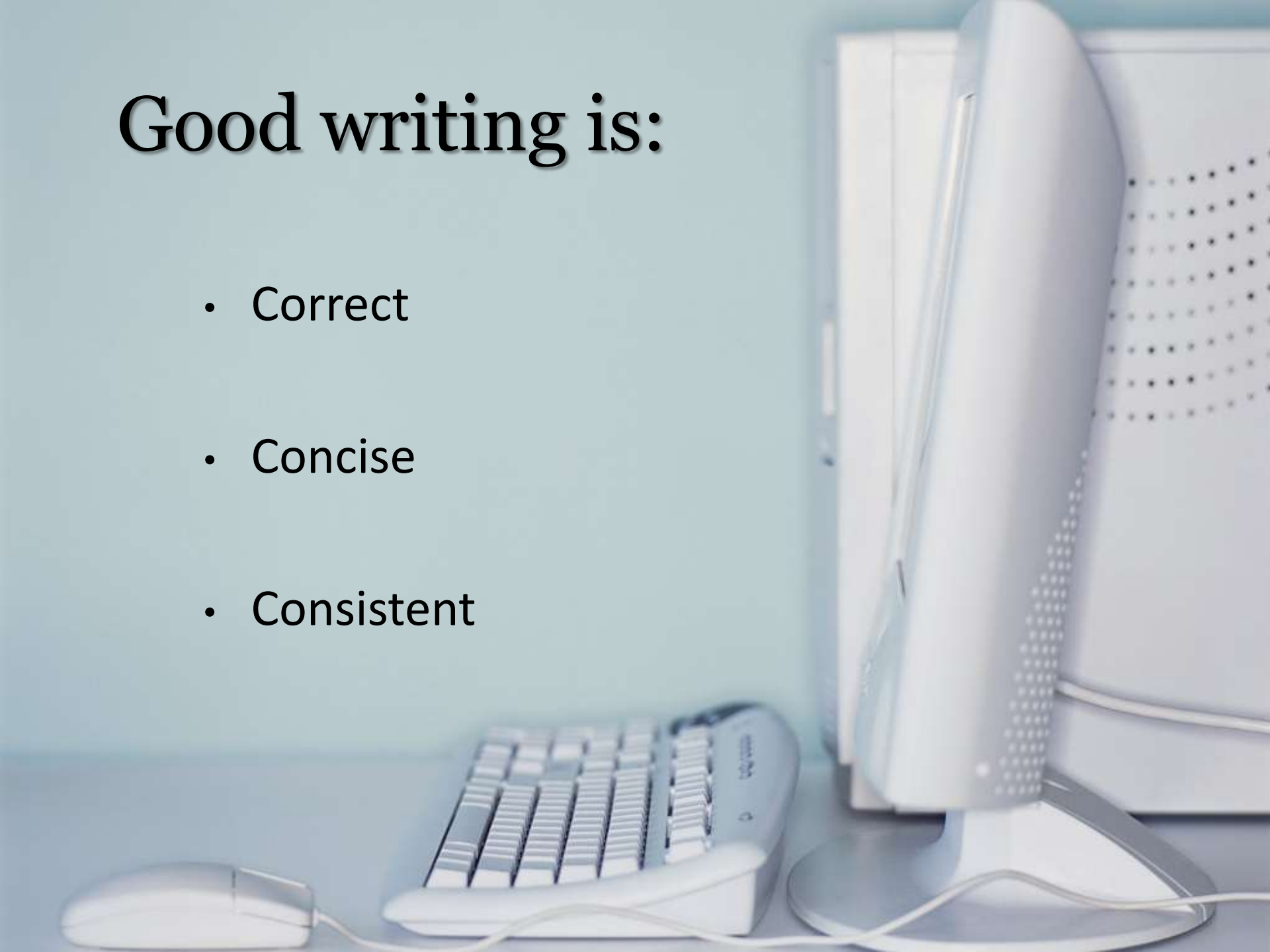
- Text-talk

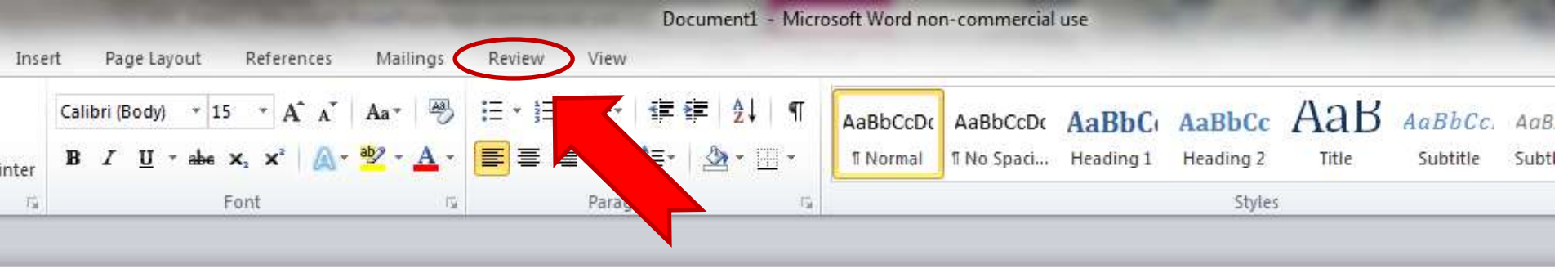
  Pls, LOL, BRB, C U L8R

- Sentence length

Good writing is:

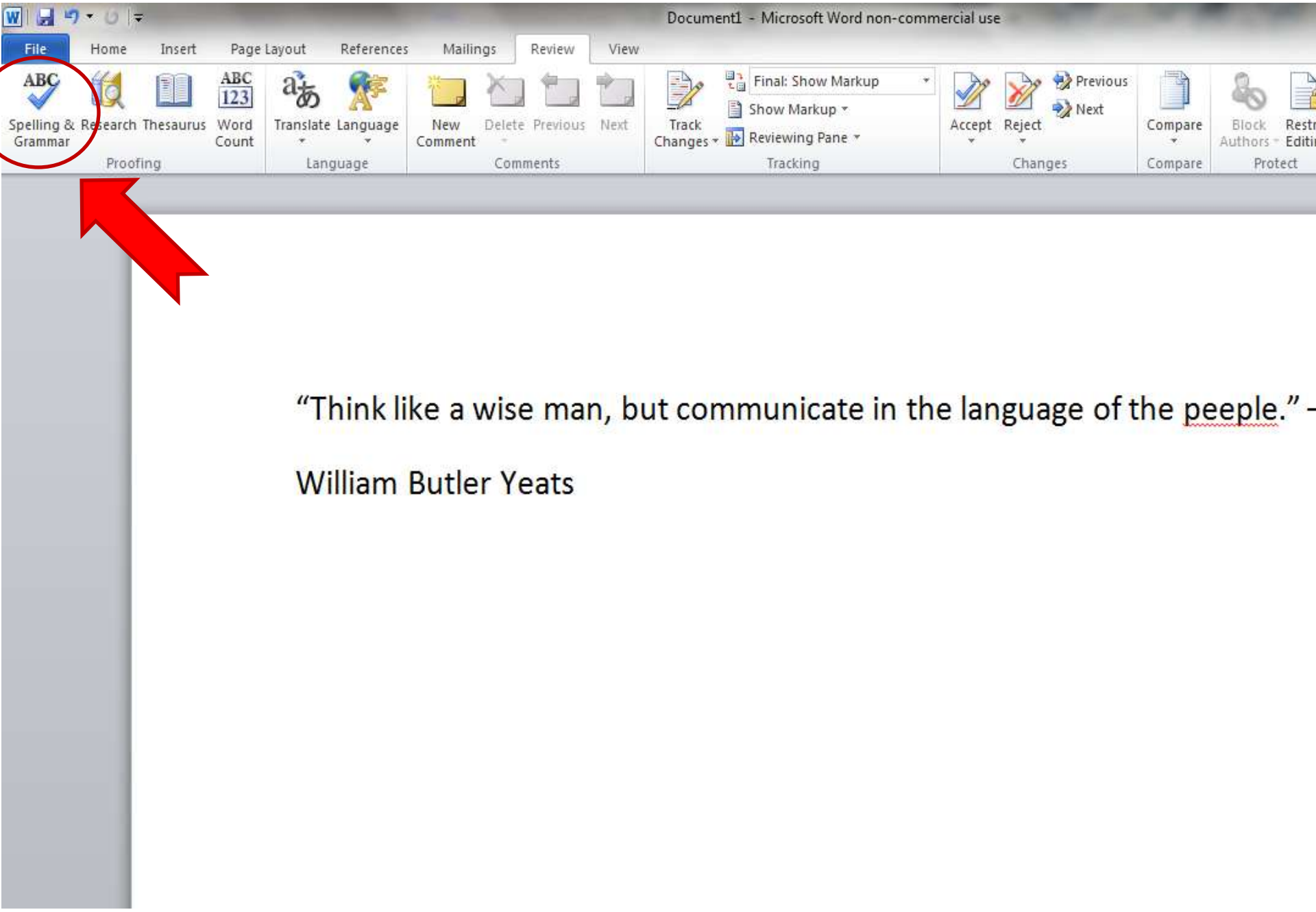
- Correct
- Concise
- Consistent





"Think like a wise man, but communicate in the language of the peeple." –

William Butler Yeats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File
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Mailings
Review
View
Spelling & Grammar
Research
Thesaurus
Word Count
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Translate
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New Comment
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Next
Comments
Track Changes
Final: Show Markup
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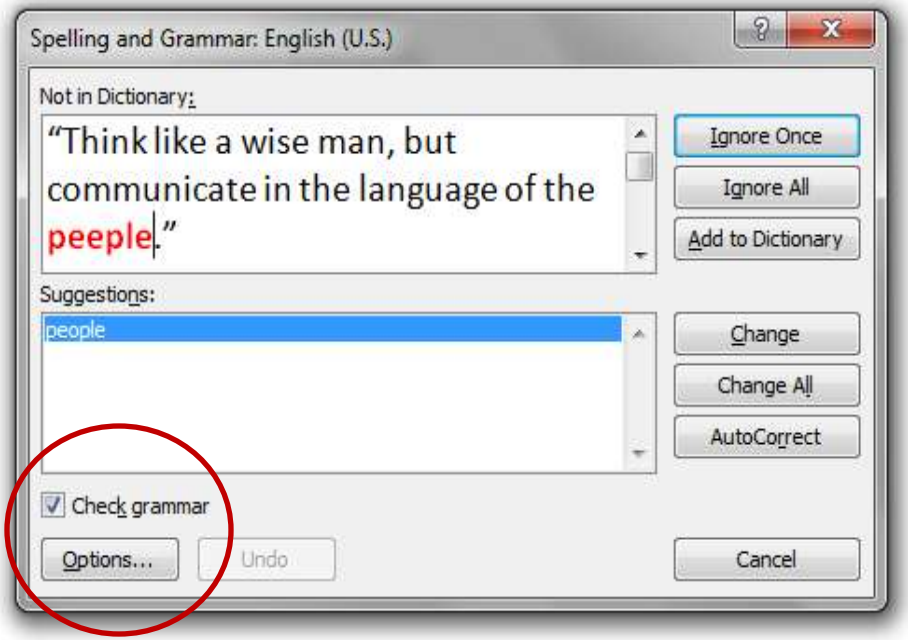

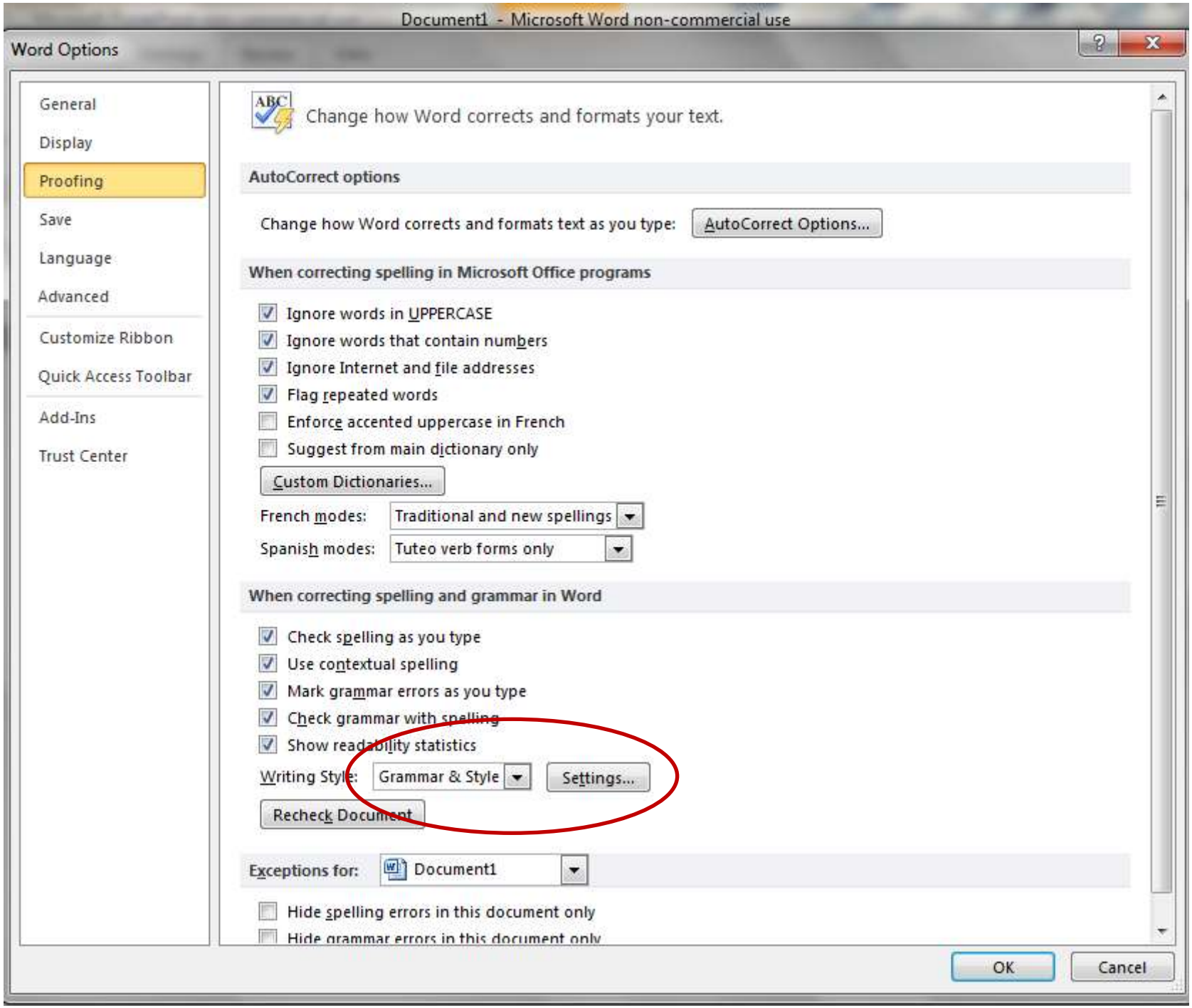
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Word Options
General
Display
Proofing
Save
Language
Advanced
Customize Ribbon
Quick Access Toolbar
Add-Ins
Trust Center
Change how Word corrects and formats your text.
AutoCorrect options
Change how Word corrects and formats text as you type:
AutoCorrect Options...
When correcting spelling in Microsoft Office programs
Ignore words in UPPERCASE
Ignore words that contain numbers
Ignore Internet and file addresses
Flag repeated words
Enforce accented uppercase in French
Suggest from main dictionary only
Custom Dictionaries...
French modes:
Traditional and new spellings
Spanish modes:
Tuteo verb forms only
When correcting spelling and grammar in Word
Check spelling as you type
Use contextual spelling
Mark grammar errors as you type
Check grammar with spelling
Show readability statistics
Writing Style:
Grammar & Style
Settings...
Recheck Document
Exceptions for:
Document1
Hide spelling errors in this document only
Hide grammar errors in this document only
OK
Cancel

Document1 - Microsoft Word non-commercial use

Word Options

- General
- Display
- Proofing
- Save
- Language
- Advanced
- Customize Ribbon
- Quick Access Toolbar
- Add-Ins
- Trust Center

Change how Word corrects and formats your text.

AutoCorrect options

Change how Word corrects and formats text as you type: AutoCorrect Options...

When correcting spelling in Microsoft Office programs

- [x] Ignore words in UPPERCASE
- [x] Ignore words that contain numbers
- [x] Ignore Internet and file addresses
- [x] Flag repeated words
- [ ] Enforce accented uppercase in French
- [ ] Suggest from main dictionary only

Custom Dictionaries...

French modes: Traditional and new spellings

Spanish modes: Tuteo verb forms only

When correcting spelling and grammar in Word

- [x] Check spelling as you type
- [x] Use contextual spelling
- [x] Mark grammar errors as you type
- [x] Check grammar with spelling
- [x] Show readability statistics

Writing Style: Grammar & Style | Settings...

Recheck Document

Exceptions for: Document1

- [ ] Hide spelling errors in this document only
- [ ] Hide grammar errors in this document only

OK | Cancel

Grammar Settings

Writing style: Grammar & Style

Grammar and style options:

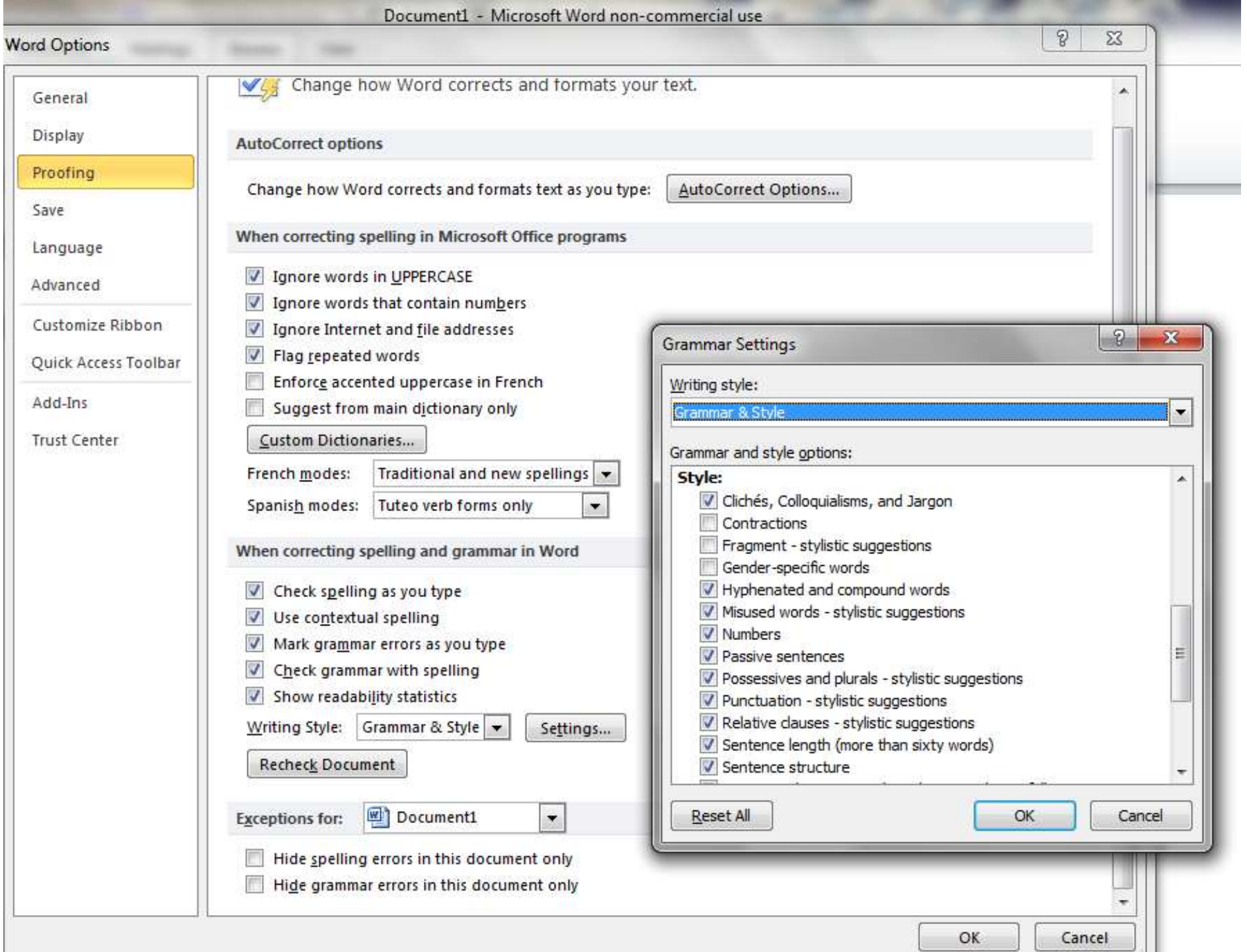
Require

- Comma required before last list item: don't check
- Punctuation required with quotes: don't check
- Spaces required between sentences: don't check

Grammar:

- [x] Capitalization
- [ ] Fragments and Run-ons
- [x] Misused words
- [x] Negation
- [x] Noun phrases
- [x] Possessives and plurals
- [x] Punctuation
- [x] Questions

Reset All | OK | Cancel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OK
Cancel
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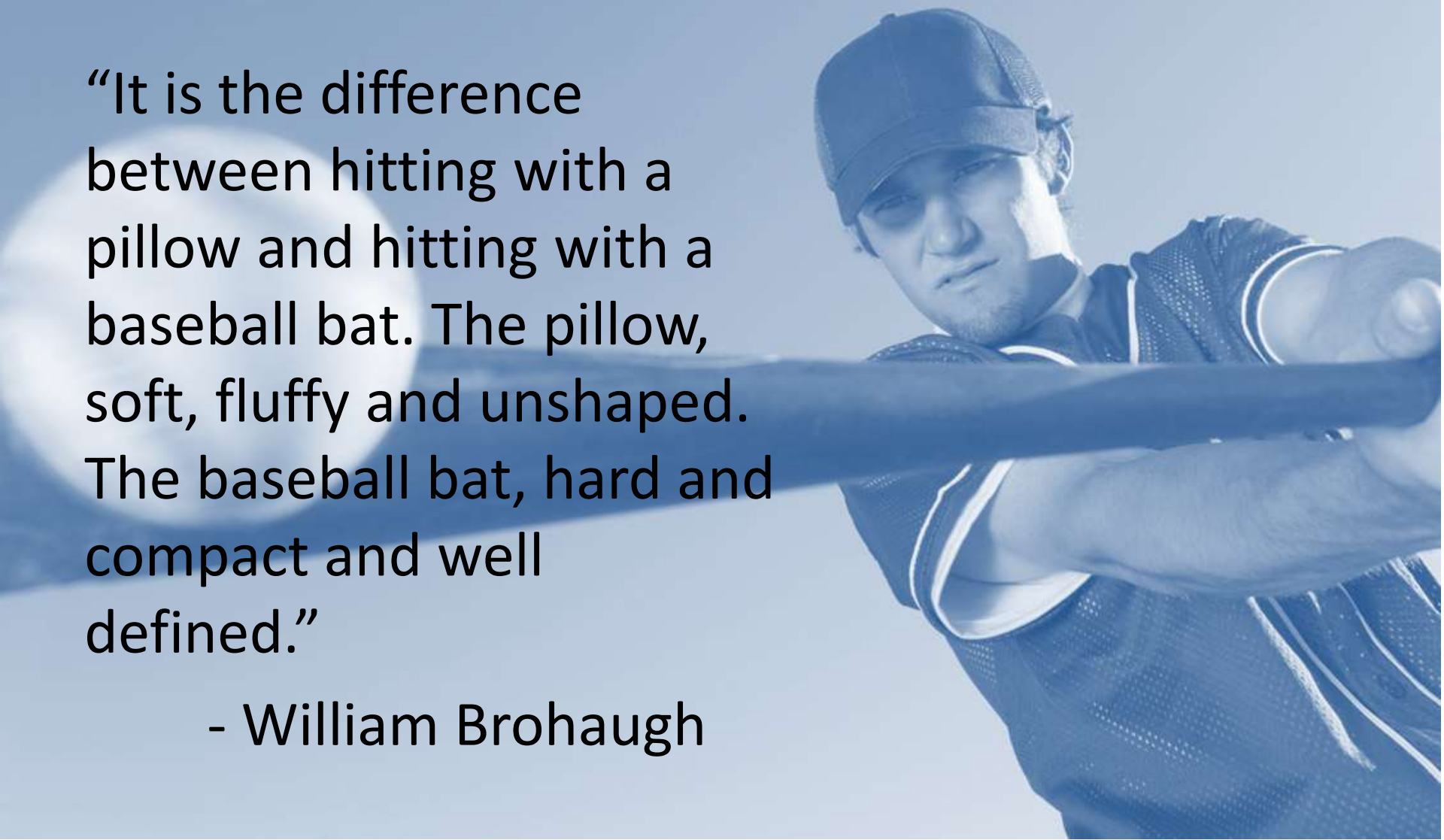
Grammar and style options:
Style:
Clichés, Colloquialisms, and Jargon
Contractions
Fragment - stylistic suggestions
Gender-specific words
Hyphenated and compound words
Misused words - stylistic suggestions
Numbers
Passive sentences
Possessives and plurals - stylistic suggestions
Punctuation - stylistic suggestions
Relative clauses - stylistic suggestions
Sentence length (more than sixty words)
Sentence structure
Reset All
OK
Cancel

Good writing is concise:



"It is the difference between hitting with a pillow and hitting with a baseball bat. The pillow, soft, fluffy and unshaped. The baseball bat, hard and compact and well defined."

- William Brohaugh

Cut out clichés and redundancies

- Complete and total
- Past experience
- Added bonus
- And also
- Each and every
- Free gift
- Join together
- Repeat again
- Over exaggerate
- New breakthrough
- Advance planning
- Basic fundamentals
- Surrounded on all sides
- The reason why is because
- End result

Commonly overused modifiers:

- Very
- Really
- Pretty
- So
- A little
- Totally
- Much

Good Writing is Consistent

Look for:

- Voice (conversational, formal)
- Tense (past, present, future)
- Person (first, second, or third person)
- Abbreviations and acronyms
- Structure

Parallel Construction

You should:

- You should make your bullet points parallel
- keep your abbreviations consistent
- To avoid making a mistake.
- Do you think punctuation matters
- Only when writing an e-mail

Project: TBC Meeting **Date: Monday, Feb 27**

A B	C D	E F	G H
I J	K L	M N MSTP = Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications	O P
Q R	S T TBC = Technical and Business Communica-tors	U V	W X
Y Z	MISC. 25-35 people		

Structured Authoring

"Information Mapping® helps authors to break complex information into its most basic elements and then present those elements optimally for readers." - Information Mapping Web site

When is structured authoring helpful? If the information is:

- Highly technical
- Complex and difficult to navigate
- Disorganized

"BEFORE"

San Luis Obispo Society for Technical Communication
P. O. Box 2533 • Atascadero, California 93423 • www.slostc.org • info@slostc.org

TO: All San Luis Obispo STC Constituents

DATE: Feb. 26, 2007

REF: Memo 2007-001

SUBJECT: Our New Chapter Theme

FROM: Adele Sommers

This memo announces the latest development in our San Luis Obispo STC strategic planning process — the adoption of a chapter theme.

Our strategic planning process challenged us to think in terms of what we do best, and how to apply that expertise to serve our constituency, drive chapter activities, and ensure future adaptability. We therefore asked ourselves, "What can we be the best in the world (or, at minimum, in the community) at doing? What domain can we champion, or 'own,' that is unique and consistent with our overarching skill set?"

Our new chapter theme was approved at the February 6, 2007 San Luis Obispo STC board meeting, and is effective immediately. This new theme derives from our use of structured information design principles. Structured information design — which is a fundamental aspect of technical communication — strives to help people successfully understand, take the appropriate action, and achieve results. Therefore, the theme is "Action through Understanding." This entails creating meaningful messages; applying principles, processes, techniques to present them; and attaining the desired outcome in terms of human performance. Effective communication in general enables consumers to comprehend information accurately. Technical communication further champions this objective by facilitating action through understanding.

One major benefit of having a chapter theme is its ability to create instant, universal recognition. Other benefits include the ability to maintain continuity and focus for our chapter activities, provide flexibility and adaptability to a variety of topics, and design many types of chapter promotions.

We encourage wide participation in our planning activities, and if you are interested in taking part, please contact Adele Sommers at pres@slostc.org.

Example of an Unstructured Memo

"AFTER"

San Luis Obispo Society for Technical Communication
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Overview:

This memo announces the latest development in our San Luis Obispo STC strategic planning process — the adoption of a **chapter theme.**

Our strategic planning process challenged us to think in terms of what we do best, and how to apply that expertise to serve our constituency, drive our chapter activities, and ensure future adaptability. We therefore asked ourselves, "What can we be the very best in the world (or, at minimum, in the community) at doing? What domain can we champion, or 'own,' that is unique and consistent with our overarching skill set?"

Proposed theme:

"Action through Understanding" has become our new chapter theme, which derives from our use of structured information design principles.

Rationale:

Structured information design — which is a fundamental aspect of technical communication — strives to help people successfully understand, take the appropriate action, and achieve results. It entails:

- Creating meaningful **messages**
- Applying principles, **processes**, and techniques to present them, *and*
- Attaining the desired **outcome** in terms of human accomplishment

Effective communication in general enables consumers to comprehend information accurately. Technical communication further champions this objective by facilitating action through understanding.

Effective date:

The new chapter theme was approved at the **February 6, 2007** San Luis Obispo STC board meeting, and is effective immediately.

Anticipated benefits:

The benefits of having a chapter theme include its ability to:

- Create instant, universal recognition
- Maintain continuity and focus for our chapter activities
- Provide flexibility and adaptability to a variety of topics
- Lend itself to many types of chapter promotions

What you can do:

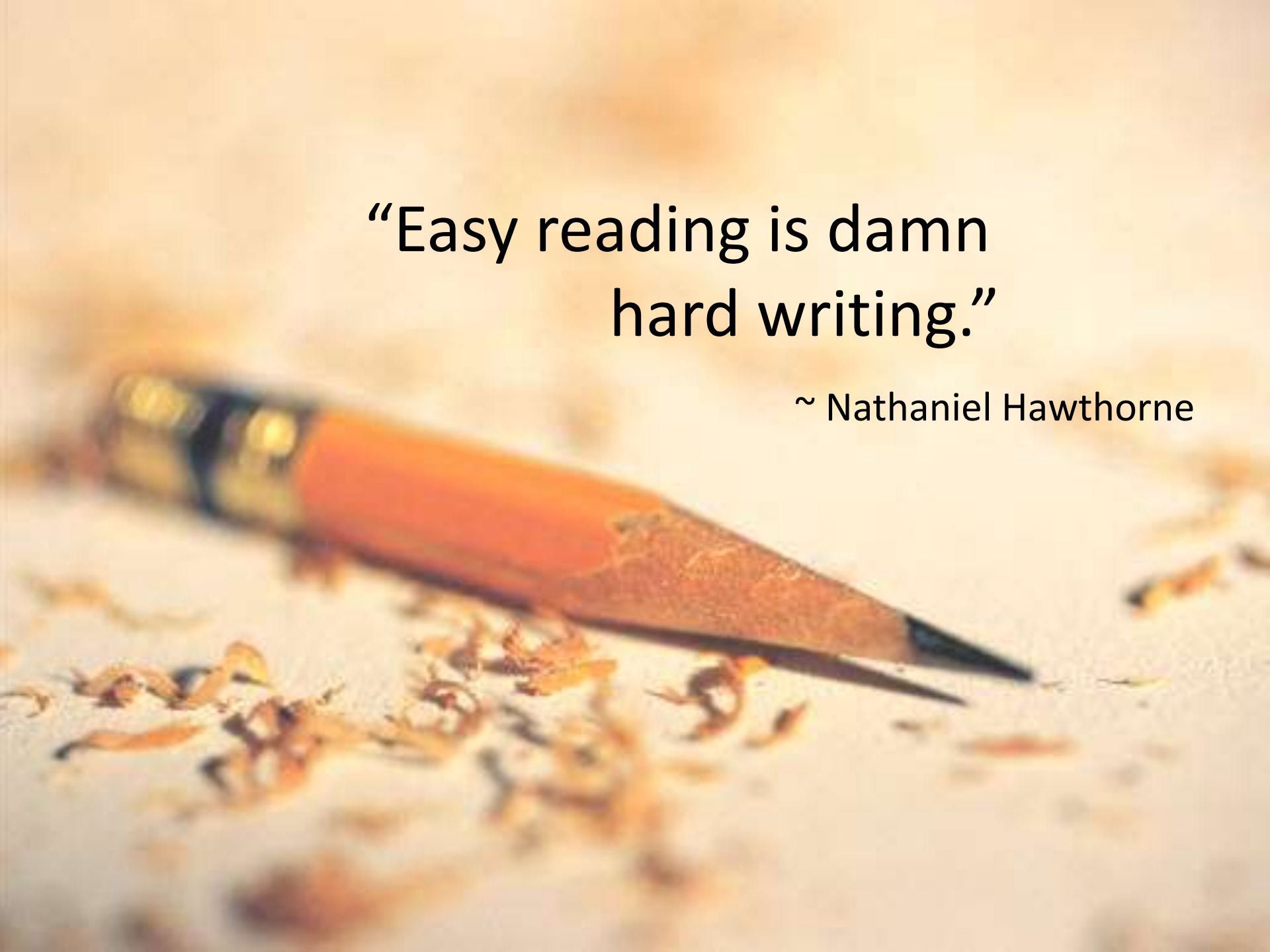
We encourage wide participation in our planning activities, and if you are interested in taking part, please contact Adele Sommers at pres@slostc.org.

Example of a Structured Memo

Stylebooks: The Basic Three

- The Chicago Manual of Style (16th Edition)
- The Associated Press Stylebook 2011
- Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications (4th Edition)

Resource	Genre	Description	Web site	Price
Chicago Manual of Style (16th Edition)	Publishing, editorial	"Editorial style and publishing practices in the digital age."	www.chicagomanualofstyle.org	$35.00/year
Associated Press Stylebook	Journalism	Guide to style, usage and punctuation with a searchable database and "Ask the Editor" feature.	www.apstylebook.com	$25.00/year
Yahoo! Style Guide	Writing for the Web	"Writing, editing and creating content for the digital world."	www.styleguide.yahoo.com	Free
Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications	Technical	Comprehensive tool for technical writers. (PDF)	www.microsoft.com/learning/en/us/Book.aspx?ID=15053	$29.99
Bartleby's	General (Includes Strunk's Elements of Style)	"…Internet publisher of literature, reference and verse … unlimited access to books and information on the Web..."	www.bartelby.com	Free
The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)	General	Searchable database with resources for writing, editing, etc. Includes APA and MLA style guides.	owl.english.purdue.edu	Free
The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation	Legal	"The definitive style guide for legal citation in the United States."	www.legalbluebook.com	$32.00/year
AMA Manual of Style	Medical	"A guide for authors and editors."	www.amamanualofstyle.com	$49.95/year $9.95/month


“Easy reading is damn
hard writing.”
~ Nathaniel Hawthorne