San Jose State University  
Spring 2016  
PolS 001: Introduction to American Government

Mondays, February 1, 2016 – May 23, 2015  
6-8:45 pm  
DMH 149A

INSTRUCTOR: Frances L. Edwards, M.U.P., Ph.D., CEM  
Professor, Political Science

OFFICE: Clark 447

OFFICE HOURS: Mondays and Tuesdays, 4:00-5:30 pm

OFFICE PHONE: (408) 924-5559 (only during office hours; please do not leave a message)

EMAIL: Pols001sjsu@yahoo.com

SOFTWARE STANDARD: Microsoft Office 2007 or compatible

NOTE: THIS IS A GREEN CLASS!  
PAPERS WILL BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY  
THROUGH THIS E-MAIL ADDRESS.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Every American and resident of the United States should understand how the government works. The United States is a federal democratic republic, and California has extended democracy further through the referendum and initiative process. The United States has multiple levels of government from small, one-school districts like the Luther Burbank School district in San Jose to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, from Bird-In-Hand, Pennsylvania to Los Angeles, from Delaware to Alaska. In this course we will discuss the organization of the United States, the roles of the different elements of the government, with an emphasis on the constitutional basis for our government.

Note: Satisfies American Institutions requirements in American and California government.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:
Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of forty-five hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week, or 9 hours, with 3 of the hours used for lecture in a 3 unit course) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to small group consultations, meeting attendance, or other practical applications of student learning as described in the syllabus.

The tentative course calendar is included in this syllabus, including assignment due dates, exam dates, dates of student presentations, and expected topics for each class. The purpose is to show you the number and kind of activities that this course will include.
During the semester there may be changes, and if these are needed students will be notified in advance of any changes.

METHODS:
The class will be a combination of reading, writing, personal research, lecture and discussion. Students may be called upon by name to address concepts from the readings. Students should take the time and effort to read the materials when they are assigned, and be prepared to actively participate in discussion. Regular attendance is expected. Participation in class is 15% of your grade. Participation in the class and related discussions will enhance your grade simply because you will have knowledge necessary to pass the test that might not otherwise be available.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Student Learning Objectives

SLO 2: Students will be able to explain how political decisions are made, their consequences for individuals and society, and how individuals and groups may affect the decision-making process. As students analyze the meaning and content of the democratic process as it has evolved in the United States and California, at a minimum, they should be able to describe:

a) the foundations of the political system, (assessed through quizzes and final exam)
b) the links between the people and government, (assessed through quizzes and final exam)
c) the operations of California government (assessed through Class 27 quiz and Council report)

SLO 3: Students should also be able to:

a) identify the tools of political action and collective decision-making at the local, state, national, and global level (assessed through quizzes and final exam); and
b) articulate the values and assumptions that inform their civic engagement (assessed through quizzes and final exam)

Political Science

- To understand the components and functions of American government
- To understand the components and functions of California government
- To understand the roles and responsibilities of a citizen in the United States
General Education

- To develop analytical skills and reasoning powers
- To increase the ability to communicate ideas effectively both in speaking and in writing;
- To enhance the ability to live and work intelligently, responsibly, and cooperatively in a multicultural society and an increasingly interdependent world
- To promote citizenship through knowledge of the forces that shape the individual and modern society
- To develop abilities to address complex issues and problems using disciplined analytic skills and creative techniques

REQUIRED READING:
Larry Gerston and Terry Christensen, *California Government and Politics*, 2012.

You will also need a writing handbook for use in creating your letter and your council meeting report. Most of you have a writing handbook from your English Writing class. If not, I recommend purchasing Diane Schmidt, *Writing in Political Science*. Used copies are readily available online. It has a guide to writing different types of documents, as well as an APA citation guide, which is the citation standard for this class. APA citation guides are also available for free at the library website, which the Long Island University is probably the easiest to use:

http://www2.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citapa.htm

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
Students are expected to be familiar with the University’s Academic Integrity Policy. Please review this at http://sa.sjsu.edu/student_conduct. “Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University’s integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical development.”

*Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.*

Plagiarism, presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person’s ideas without giving proper credit, will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University.

For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student. **IF YOU CHEAT, PLAGIARIZE, FAIL TO ATTRIBUTE DIRECTLY Copied OR PARAPHRASED MATERIAL, BUY A PAPER, USE SOMEONE ELSE’S PAPER, OR IN ANY OTHER WAY VIOLATE THE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY, YOU WILL FAIL THIS COURSE, regardless of previous standing!**

CLASSROOM COURTESY:
Students come to class to learn. The professor comes to class to teach. If you are not focused on the activities of the class, please do not come. As a courteous person you will be sure that your cell phone is turned off during class. If your phone rings during class

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you will be expected to leave to answer it and not return. Texting is not acceptable in class. Playing games, e-mailing, reading non-class material is all unacceptable behavior. The class meets only once a week, and we want to use that time as a learning community. Please respect each other and the professor.

RECORDING AND SHARING LIMITATIONS:
Common courtesy and professional behavior dictate that you notify someone when you are recording him or her. You must obtain the instructor’s permission to make audio or video recordings in this class. Such permission allows the recordings to be used for your private, study purposes only. The recordings are the intellectual property of the instructor; you have not been given any rights to reproduce or distribute the material.

Likewise, you must obtain the written permission of any guest speaker and every class member if you will be recording presentations or class discussions.

Students desiring to record any part of any class must justify the need to record the material and obtain the instructor’s written permission. Students with functional limitations should obtain a letter from the Accessible Education Center.

Course material developed by the instructor is the intellectual property of the instructor and cannot be shared publicly without her approval. You may not publicly share or upload instructor generated material for this course such as exam questions, lecture notes, PowerPoint shows or homework solutions without the specific written instructor consent.

DROPPING AND ADDING:
You are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, and other information found at http://sa.sjsu.edu/student_conduct. You should be aware of the new deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

RESOURCES:
San Jose State University Library has research tools. One class session will be devoted to an introduction to the research support and literature resources available through the library. All students, regardless of previous experience with the library are expected to attend this session, and are expected to be familiar with these research tools, and to access them to support required research activities.

ADA ACCOMMODATION:
It is the goal of this class to be a positive learning experience for every student! If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special accommodations in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. All accommodations require a letter from the Accessible Education Center to ensure equitable treatment for all students.

ample notice to the DRC [AEC] testing office and must be submitted to the instructor well in advance of the exam date.”

LEARNING ASSISTANCE RESOURCE CENTER:
The Learning Assistance Resource Center is designed to assist students in the development of their full academic potential and to motivate them to become self-directed learners. The center provides support services, such as skills assessment, individual or group tutorials, subject advising, learning assistance, summer academic preparation and basic skills development. The Learning Assistance Resource Center is located in Room 600 in the Student Services Center on 9th Street. For more information about LARC go to http://www.sjsu.edu/larc/.

SJSU WRITING CENTER:
The SJSU Writing Center in Clark Hall, Room 126, is staffed by professional instructors and upper-division or graduate-level writing specialists from each of the seven SJSU colleges. Their writing specialists have met a rigorous GPA requirement, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. For more details go to http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/.

MAKE-UP POLICY:
Serious personal or dependent family illness that can be documented is the only acceptable excuse for not taking a quiz on time. If you are ill contact the professor to make arrangements to take the quiz in the first class that you attend. You will be given a reasonable extension for submission of missing work if it is a prolonged illness, but since all papers are submitted on-line, being sick for one day is not an excuse for failure to turn in work the day it is due. **There are no make-ups for missed presentations.** Incompletes are discouraged.

PARTICIPATION:
Students may be called upon by name to address concepts from the readings. Students should take the time and effort to read the materials provided when they are assigned, and be prepared to actively participate in discussion of the topics, using both citations of the readings and their own defended views. Regular attendance is expected and will enhance your grade simply because you will have knowledge necessary to complete the quizzes and final exam that might not otherwise be available except from class discussion.

GRADING COMPONENTS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plagiarism tutorial</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Meeting Report/presentation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Representatives/Letter to a public official</td>
<td>5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test/post test</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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GRADE VALUES:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82-87</td>
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<td>80-81</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>75-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>70-74</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>69 and below</td>
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PLAGIARISM TUTORIAL:
Every student will take the plagiarism tutorial at the library’s website. Access it from this URL: [http://tutorials.sjlibrary.org/tutorial/plagiarism/index.htm](http://tutorials.sjlibrary.org/tutorial/plagiarism/index.htm). At the end you will receive a page with a score. **You must get an 80 or better to complete the assignment.** Repeat the tutorial until you get 80 or better. Be sure you understand the rules for citing materials. Cut and paste the score sheet showing your **name and your acceptable (80 or better) score** into an e-mail. Send that score sheet to the class e-mail by **August 31.**

QUIZZES:
There will be a quiz at the beginning of selected classes. The average of the quizzes will be 20% of the final grade. There are no make-ups for quizzes, except for documented severe illness. Missed quizzes will be counted as “0”. The lowest grade will be dropped for each student before figuring the final grade.

COUNCIL MEETING REPORT:
During the week of March 14 or 21 you will attend the city council meeting of your choice. Most city councils meet on Tuesday. San Jose meets from 1:30 pm – 5 pm and on certain weeks they also have an evening session focused on items of special interest to the community. Other city council meetings start at 5:30 pm or 6:00 pm or later. Check with the City Clerk’s Office for which week they meet and at what time. We will not have class on March 21 in exchange for the council meeting night. You must stay at the city council meeting for 3 hours or the length of the meeting, whichever is shorter, but you are encouraged to stay until the meeting is over, if possible. Get a copy of the agenda at the City Clerk’s website for the city of your choice. For example, the San Jose agenda is available at [http://www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=399](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=399) Review the items to be covered and note the staff reports that are available. Get a copy of the staff report for the topic you will write about.

When you get to the Council meeting get an agenda from the back tables in the Council Chamber, as there can be changes up to the start of the meeting. Select one agenda item that causes discussion during the council meeting and take notes on which council members speak and what position they take on the issue. Was there public testimony or comment on the topic? Was there an obvious stakeholder group participating? (e.g.,

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Friends of the Library, a neighborhood association) Did the public or stakeholder testimony seem to influence the Councilmembers?

If you have a class or work conflict with Tuesday nights see me to set up an alternate method to attend a city council meeting. *Any changes must be arranged by March 7!*

Write a 5 page report, double spaced, Times New Roman font, on your experience, DUE April 4. Discuss the following issues:

Select an action item on the agenda that generated discussion (not consent, not committee reports) and write about it as follows, using the observations from the meeting and the staff report obtained from the City Clerk’s website or the city clerk’s office. (You will be able to access the agenda about 10 days before the meeting, and the staff reports the Friday before the meeting. Review both before you go to be familiar with the topics at hand.) See if the Mercury News had an article or editorial about any of the topics before or after the meeting.

1. Introduction:
   a. How many Councilmembers were present? Who else was on the dais?
   b. About how many people were in the audience?
   c. How long did the meeting last?
   d. How many items on the agenda generated discussion?
   e. How many items on the agenda were passed with little or no discussion (not counting consent)?

2. Analysis of the item:
   a. Name and number of the item
   b. Who sponsored the item? A city department, Councilmember, stakeholder group? (see staff report)
   c. What was the discussion of the item focused on?
   d. What stakeholders spoke about the item?
   e. Did the public testimony appear to influence the Council?
   f. Was there newspaper coverage of the item before the council meeting, or an editorial on the item?
   g. Which Councilmembers spoke about the item and what positions did they take?
   h. Was the proposed staff recommendation accepted? Were there any amendments?
   i. How much will it cost?

*Students must take care that appropriate APA citations are used.* You will be using staff reports and newspaper reports, and possibly quotations from people at the meeting. Direct quotations must be so indicated with quotation marks and a specific reference to the meeting date or the page in the source from which it was taken. Ideas from others may be paraphrased and must also be referenced, although quotations marks are inappropriate.

On Monday, February 8 class will be held in the Library to meet with the department’s librarian to learn about the technologies that the library has to offer to support your research and learning. This will then ensure that you have the skills to find and read pre-meeting coverage and post meeting coverage of the meeting. On the selected date be prepared to turn in your paper, discuss the council meeting in class, and report on the item you selected for your report.

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The Council meeting report paper will be evaluated using the following criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) The professionalism with which the essay is presented: clarity, appearance, grammar, spelling, appropriate word choice, “voice”.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The comprehensiveness and care with which the council topic is described</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) The demonstration of understanding of the council members’ positions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) The demonstration of understanding of the stakeholders’ positions: members of the public, city staff members, business groups</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Analysis and completeness of the “introduction” items in the instructions above</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
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**LIST OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS/LETTER TO A PUBLIC OFFICIAL:**

On the selected day you will turn in a hard copy list of the elected officials that represent you now: **congress member, state senator, state assemblymember, Board of Supervisors member, city council member (if your community has districts) or mayor.** Include the name, title, mailing address and governmental area covered (e.g. congressional district number).

Grading = 5 for perfect list, one point off for every mistake or incomplete information.

You will then select from that list one of these officials to contact. Write a letter to the selected local, state or federal elected official on your list on any policy matter **UNDER HIS/HER CONTROL** that is of concern to you. Research a topic of personal interest to you, understand the current status of the matter, and address your letter to the appropriate elected official. Have a clear question or request that will generate a response. This material will be discussed and reviewed in class.

On a day to be selected you will turn in a corrected draft of your letter to the professor through the e-mail address for final grading and correction by the professor. **DO NOT MAIL IT YET!** When you get the professor’s comments back, correct your letter and send it, and e-mail a copy of the final version to the professor. If you get a response, please show the professor a copy of the answer. Possible topics could include financing of higher education, subsidy for solar power, homeless issues, affordable housing issues or development plans for the city. Examples: Congressmember Zoe Lofgren on immigration or high speed rail funding; State Senator Jim Beall on the death penalty or higher education tuition; Supervisor Ken Yeager on medical care, mental health services or juvenile justice services; your councilmember on an issue that is important in your district (e.g., need for better park maintenance, pot clubs, gang diversion program, potholes in the street).

The letter will be evaluated using the following criteria:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Completeness/correctness of the name and address list for your representatives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The professionalism with which the letter’s issue is presented: clarity, appearance, grammar, spelling, appropriate word choice, “voice”.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) The comprehensiveness and care with which the request for assistance is framed.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) The demonstration of understanding of the topic leading to the creation of a well-written letter</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5</td>
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**FINAL EXAM: Monday, May 23, 2016 – normal class time**
The final exam will be in two parts. The first will be multiple choice, short answer or fill in the blank. There will be 45 minutes allotted for this part. The second part will be essay. You will have a choice of questions to write on.

For the essay portion you may have **one sheet of notes, double sided**, that contains notes from any portion of the course or course materials, with your name on it. Bring at least 2 bluebooks and at least 3 pens or pencils to class. **You may not leave for any reason during the exam.** You will turn in your sheet of notes, the exam paper and your bluebooks together when you are finished, or at the end of class. They will all be returned when the test is graded.

Make up finals will only be available during finals week unless arrangements are made for an Incomplete before the end of finals period. Make-up finals are only offered for those with a serious medical condition that is documented. The make-up will be all essay and not the essays used for the class final.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class Plan</th>
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</table>
| 1     | Feb 1  | **Introduction/Welcome**  
Attendance, add codes, pre-test. Introduction of students, review of syllabus and course expectations. |
|       |        | **Readings: George Orwell essay; critical thinking materials. (e-mailed)**  
*Good writing* in political science; what is critical thinking? |
| 2     | Feb 8  | Wilson, Chapt 1: Study of American Government  
Who represents you at the federal, state and local levels? What do the different levels of government do? What issues concern you that are addressed by the different levels of government? |
|       |        | Wilson, Chapt. 2: The Constitution; bring a copy of the US Constitution to class. Be prepared to review and discuss it. |
| 3     | Feb 15 | **Library Day.** Meet in the Room TBA at the library with Paul Kauppila, Political Science librarian. Learn about the research tools available to help with your papers, including Citation help, and sources for information on Council agenda items and elected officials’ contact information. |
|       |        | **Quiz on Chapt. 1 & 2: Government and Constitution**  
Chapter 4: Civil Liberties/ Bill of Rights  
Liberty versus security?  
Fighting terrorism versus surveillance. NSA leaks. |
| 4     | Feb 22 | Chapter 5: Civil Rights  
Chapter 3: Federalism |
| 5     | Feb 29 | **Quiz on Chapt. 3,4,5 Civil Liberties, Civil Rights and Federalism**  
Chapter 6: Public Opinion and the Media  
Wilson Chapt. 7: Political parties and interest groups |
| 6     | Mar 7  | **Quiz on 6 & 7: Public Opinion, Media, Political Parties and Interest Groups**  
Wilson: Chapter 8: Campaigns and Elections  
Wilson: Chapter 9: Congress |
| 7     | Mar 14 | **Quiz on Chapt 8 & 9: Campaigns and Elections and Congress**  
City, County and State Government roles – PPT; city hall video tour.  
Discussion of San Jose Council meeting; review of agenda; review of local newspaper coverage. Expectations for attendance at city council meeting. Logistics issues. |
| 8     | Mar 15 to 25 | **Attend a City Council meeting of your choice.** Most meet on Tuesday evenings, but San Jose also meets on Tuesday afternoons, 1:30-5:00 pm. Stay at least 3 hours, but until the end of possible. Stay long enough to hear substantive discussion of issues. Write a report on this experience, instructions in syllabus.  
**NOTE:** if you cannot attend council meetings on Tuesdays due to a class or work conflict, see me for alternatives. |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class Plan</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
<td>Mar 21</td>
<td><strong>NO CLASS IN TRADE FOR 10/6 COUNCIL MEETING!!</strong> Review the news coverage of the day before’s council meeting; research other information needed for the report on the city council meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 28</td>
<td><strong>NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 9     | Apr 4  | COUNCIL REPORT DRAFT DUE TODAY  
Student oral reports/discussion on the council meeting you attended between Mar 15 and 25.  
Bring a complete **draft to class** of your report in either electronic or paper format for your use in the discussion of the council meeting. After you have heard all the discussion you may submit your final version electronically either at the end of class if it is ready, or you may revise it and submit it electronically by **5 pm on Friday, April 8. NO PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER April 8!** |
| 10    | April 11 | Wilson, Chapter 10: The Executive branch of government: The Presidency  
Wilson, Chapter 11: The Bureaucracy |
| 11    | Apr 18 | Quiz on 10 & 11: Presidency and Bureaucracy  
Submit corrected list of elected officials and draft letter by e-mail to professor for grading and correction. Due by 9 am by e-mail.  
Wilson, Chapt. 12: The Judiciary  
Wilson Chapt. 13: Domestic and Economic policy |
| 12    | Apr 25 | Quiz on Chapt. 12: Judiciary  
Wilson Chapt 14: Foreign and military policy  
Wilson, Chapt. 20  
Issues for future concern: El Nino, drought; global warming, ice age |
| 13    | May 2  | Quiz on Chapt. 13 & 14: Domestic, Economic and Foreign Policy  
Gerston p. 1-100 – The unique features of California, its history, its governance.  
Governor, legislature and Supreme Court  
Gerston – critical issues in California |
| 14    | May 9  | Quiz on Gerston  
21st Century California: emergency management: natural and technological threats, CBRNE terrorism, cybersecurity |
| 15    | May 16 | Current challenges to local governments: Guest Speaker TBD  
Post test, In-class review, party |
| Final | May 23 | Final Exam= 6:00 pm- note time change |
Spelling and Grammar Guidance

Common Student Mistakes!!

1. Never use a long word when a short word will do. (George Orwell)

2. Never use “etc.” in a professional paper. It is meaningless. If you want to indicate that your list is only part of a larger potential list, say, “grapes, peaches and pears, for example,” or “among other things,” or a similar phrase.

3. Use your grammar checker, THEN proof read to be sure you selected the right usage in context.
   a. Be careful of the “passive voice rule.” It is often appropriate, and if it should be changed to active voice, the suggested wording almost never makes sense.
   b. Never use “change all” for a grammar rule, as it will lead to odd usages. Just read each suggestion and decide whether to change based on each sentence.

4. Use your spell checker, THEN proof read to be sure you selected the right word in context.

5. Check to be sure you are using the right homonym: Check especially for these four frequently misused sets:
   a. Their, there
   b. Right, write, rite, wright
   c. Sight, site, cite
   d. Its, it’s

6. Do not use contractions in formal writing unless it is a direct quote: Don’t, Can’t, It’s, Won’t, and all the others!

7. Check on capitalization. A sentence begins with a capital letter, as does a proper name of someone or someplace or an organization. Federal, state, city and local are only capitalized if they start a sentence or are part of a title or proper name. The federal government is not a proper name but the United States Government is, for example.

8. Capitalize at the start of most quotes, even when they are inside a sentence. Here is an example. I went to class and Professor Edwards said, “Do not ever use a contraction when writing for this class.” Titles are only capitalized when they come before a name: (Professor Edwards, the professor).

9. If you want to use an abbreviation or acronym (e.g., FEMA), be sure to spell it out the first time you use it. For example, “When James Lee Witt was head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), he came to San Jose. He wanted to show FEMA’s support for Mayor Susan Hammer.”

10. Be careful that you use “then” and “than” properly. “Then” is related to time sequences. For example, I went to school, then I took a nap.” A mnemonic that will help you to

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remember the right order is that “Then” is related to “Time” and both have an “e.”
“Than” is a comparison, such as, “I like cherries more than bananas.” Both have “a”.

11. Be careful in using the apostrophe for possessive and plural. For a plural word in English you just add the letter “s” or sometimes “es” or “ies.” There is no punctuation for plural. In general, to form a possessive you use “’s”. For example, “my dog’s bone.” The only exception is the word “its” which means “belonging to it” but does not take the punctuation. It’s means “it is,” a contraction, and you do not use contractions in formal writing.

12. In general you do not use commas after prepositional phrases. “In support of his position John gave two examples.” However, if you have several prepositional phrases before the main sentence you may set them off with commas to make it clear what relates to what. “In supporting his team for the finals, John wore a Shark’s shirt to school.”

13. Hyphens are used to join words that modify another word. For example, political-science professor, little-used car, pickled-herring merchant. Without the hyphens it might be hard to tell if the science professor was running for president, the used car was small, or the fish seller was drunk!

14. Abbreviations are only used for titles (Mr., Ms., Dr.) or standard suffixes (Jr., Sr., Ph.D.). States are abbreviated only when using a proper address, not in prose.

15. Numbers: spell out the word for numbers up to two words, and all numbers that begin a sentence (One hundred fifty boys went to school.) Write out the numbers if over 100 (e.g., 101 because that would be “one hundred one”). Always use the numerals for percentages, money, road routes or scientific calculations.

16. Italics within a sentence should be used for titles of works (books, movies, plays, poems, television programs), but not for Bible or Constitution. Italics are also used for foreign words, such as vis a vis. Avoid foreign words unless you are very sure you are using them correctly.

17. None and neither are always singular words. They were originally contractions that became their own words – none= no one, not one, and neither = not either one. So, singular verb forms are used with none and neither.

18. The verb agrees with the subject number. “There is one child here.” “There are no children here.” The verb does not agree with the complement. “None of the boys is going to the game.”

19. Gerunds are always singular. “Encouraging good writing is important.”

20. Pronouns must match the noun and verb. “The doctors finished their rounds.” “The doctor finished his rounds.” When you do not know the gender, use masculine. Singular generic nouns must take “he” or “she.” Do not use “they” to avoid the gender problem!