A grammar / style refresher.[1]

If one of the following choices is not obviously superior to the others, we are all in trouble. Keep this list handy as you write your papers in my class and make the right choices when the time comes! Each pair or set of comparisons below contains a bad way to write and a better way. Pick the better way.

1. In regards to this paper, I will be discussing how framing affects public policy…
2. In this paper, I discuss how framing affects public policy …
3. Framing affects public policy…

4. In the society that we live in today, there are layers of regulations intended to prevent fraud…
5. Layers of regulations help prevent fraud…

6. A lobbyist must spend time convincing their clients…
7. A lobbyist must spend time convincing his clients…
8. Lobbyists spend time convincing their clients…

9. This paper is going to explore…
10. This paper explores…

11. The public at large understands little about lobbyists and they spend much of their time monitoring…
12. Members of the public understand little about lobbyists. In particular, most people may not be aware that lobbyists spend much of their time monitoring…

13. There are many reasons why lobbying is important…
14. Lobbying matters for the following reasons…

15. The need for a land-use lobbyist is created when developers need a zoning variance.
16. Developers wanting a zoning variance may need a lobbyist.

17. This paper reviews the effect of lobbyists on…
18. This paper reviews the affect of lobbyists on…

19. This paper reviews how lobbyists effect legislation on…
20. This paper reviews how lobbyists affect legislation on…

21. …the lobbyist's role in x, y, and z, and their role in the legislative process more generally…
22. …the lobbyist's role in x, and his role in the legislative process more generally …

[1] Thanks to Prof. Margaret Keck of Johns Hopkins for some help in compiling this list

23. …lobbyists' roles in x, and in the legislative process more generally …

24. From the available evidence, it appears that…
25. Evidence suggests that…

26. It's clear that I don't know the difference between its as a possessive and it's as a contraction for "it is."
27. Its clear that I don't know the difference between its as a possessive and it's as a contraction for "it is."

28. Its claws exposed, the cat was going to fight back.
29. It's claw's exposed, the cat was going to fight back.
30. It's claws exposed, the cat was going to fight back.

Know the difference between adjectives that refer to continuous v. discrete quantities.
Continuous words: much, amount, large
Discrete words: number, many, fewer

Some of the examples below will make you cringe and no one would ever write them. However, you'd be surprised how people forget these simple rules sometimes in other cases.

1. A large number of people have been affected by the flood…
2. A large amount of people have been affected by the flood…

3. Fewer dollars were spent
4. Less dollars were spent

5. Fewer money was spent
6. Less money was spent

7. A large number of dollars was raised…
8. A large number of dollars were raised…
9. A large amount of dollars was raised…
10. A large amount of dollars were raised…

11. A large amount of money was raised…
12. A large number of monies was raised…

13. Much ice cream was wasted…
14. Many ice creams were wasted…

15. Much strawberry was wasted…
16. Many strawberries were wasted…

17. A huge quantity of dollars was spent…
18. A huge number of dollars was spent…

19. There's a large amount of sand on the beach…
20. There's a large amount of grains of sand on the beach…

21. There's a large number of grains of sand on the beach…
22. There's a large number of sand on the beach…

23. Theives stole many things
24. Theives stole much things

25. Theives stole many stuff
26. Theives stole much stuff

Often when you use a phrase that refers to a quantity of individuals you switch from plural to singular because you have put all the individuals into a group. Examples:

1. A majority of Americans supports…
2. A majority of Americans support…

3. Many/most Americans supports…
4. Many/most Americans support…

5. The international community supports…
6. The international community support…

7. Leading members of the international community supports…
8. Leading members of the international community support…

You are poli sci majors, you should know this:

1. Washington DC is the nation's capital
2. Washington DC is the nation's capitol

3. The House and Senate meet in the capitol building
4. The House and Senate meet in the capital building

Frequently the kinds of **descriptors** we use in daily conversation mean something different in written language. Some examples to watch out for:

Unique is only the right word if it refers to something absolutely singular, the only one of its kind, unlike anything else. Unique NEVER takes a modifier; it's like pregnant: you either are or you are not. You can't be very unique, amazingly unique, a little bit unique; this word never takes an adjective.

Incredible is only the right word if it refers to something that's impossible or at least very hard to believe. That is, it means literally what it means: that something is not credible. In everyday speech, we know it means something different. But writing is not speaking.

Ditto with *amazing*; very few things are amazing when you think about it, or at least they should not be to the reader when you are the writer. In general, leave the informal chatter for informal chattering, and restrict your vocabulary in academic writing to more formal presentations.

Finally, things to avoid:
1. Sending your professor a document by email attachment with a name like: Paper.doc. Professors get a lot of papers. Name your file something where if the professor gets 27 of them on the same day, yours can be identified. Examples of good file names: MyLastName-paper-4Nov2013.docx. MyLastName-Resume.pdf.

2. Handing in an assignment with:
   a. No name on it
   b. No page numbers
   c. No title
   d. Bad margins and spacing
   The solution to this: Make a template and always use it.

3. Making an academic paper read as if it were a mystery novel. In academic writing, you should start by saying exactly what you are going to demonstrate. Then review the literature, explain your project, explain why the question is important, all those things. Then present the information / evidence that supports your conclusion. Then at the end draw out the conclusions or implications from your study. Two things to avoid: a) keeping the reader in suspense, ever, or ever allowing the reader to wonder why they are reading something (it should always be clear, because as author you provide a template and road map for your argument); and b) conclusions that are just summaries / repetitions of your evidence. The conclusion should answer the "so what" or "what now" question: You demonstrated something, now explain why it is important.