Academic writing for computer scientists
Keep it simple and direct

terminate  end
endeavour  try
commence  start
locate  find

the vast majority of  most
in today’s modern world  currently
Abbreviations

didn’t, can’t they’re  X

e.g, i.e. etc.  X

...dynamic multiprocessing operating system (DMOS). A DMOS was also used...
Use a citation style

- There is no specific preferred citation style for Computer Science & Software Engineering. Check with your lecturer. ACM or IEEE templates can be used for submitting to ACM or IEEE publications.

Choose a style that provides good, detailed information.

Provide a reference for any information you obtained from published sources.
Avoid long dependent clauses

Although John was hungry because he had only eaten two weetbix for breakfast and had then run for 20 k and been for a swim before cycling to the campus, he did not buy a pie.

John was hungry because he had only eaten two weetbix for breakfast and had then run for 20 k and been for a swim before cycling to the campus. In spite of this hunger, he did not buy a pie.
Use punctuation

John was hungry because he had only eaten two weetbix for breakfast and had then run for 20k and been for a swim before cycling to the campus; however, he did not buy a pie.

Although John was hungry, he did not buy a pie. (Do you need the extra detail?)
Overloaded sentence

Studying Computer Science at the University of Canterbury in the twenty-first century with a view to majoring or even completing postgraduate study in Computer Science can be very demanding and can require a wide range of skills that can be learnt along the way by diligent and motivated students who are willing to learn and to take advice.
Improved version

Studying Computer Science at the University of Canterbury in the twenty first century at undergraduate or postgraduate study level can be very demanding. It requires a wide range of skills that can be learnt by diligent and motivated students.
As we could not import the wonderful Xb245z22 software from the USA, we were bitterly disappointed, and this blighted our efforts and depressed our spirits.

The Xb245z22 software proved to be unavailable.
Objective writing

I counted the chickens.  [considered subjective]
The chickens were counted.  [normal for science]
It was not possible for the chickens to be counted.  [a bit awkward]
We counted the chickens.  [OK in COSC]
The researcher counted the chickens.  X
One counted the chickens.  X
Active and passive

James baked the cake. [active]

The cake was baked in the afternoon. [passive – no need to say who did it]
Do not nominalise

The manufacture of the cake was facilitated by James. [distorted passive]

The usefulness of the instrument is great. [distorted passive]

The instrument is very useful. [active]
Spell correctly

Spell-checkers do not alert you to spelling errors if you have spelt a word correctly (but used it wrongly).

Their/there
Were/where
Sought/sort
Borders/boarders
Affect/effect
Write in complete sentences

John cries. ✓

John crying X

John to cry X

We followed the approach taken by Jones. This being very effective for this application. X
Avoid fragments

John was extremely sick. Because of eating too much pie. X

Because he ate too much pie, John was sick. ✓
John was sick because he ate too much pie. ✓
Due to eating too much pie, John was sick. X
With eating too much pie, John was sick. X
Avoid comma splices

John ate six pies, he was sick.  X
John ate six pies, so he was sick.  ✓
John was sick because he ate six pies.  ✓
John ate six pies; consequently, he was sick.  ✓
John ate pies; Mary ate cake.  ✓

[Join two complete sentences with a joining word and/or a semi-colon.]
Write in paragraphs

A paragraph is a solid block of text that makes a point or addresses a single topic. Do not start new lines within a paragraph. Denote a new paragraph by starting on a new line and indenting five spaces from the margin. Some people denote a paragraph break by omitting a complete line and starting the new paragraph against the margin. This is confusing if the new paragraph starts on a new page.
Topic sentences

The topic sentence is the first or second sentence in a paragraph. It makes the overall point of the paragraph. Write this in your own words. Bring in detailed explanation and evidence to support your point after the topic sentence.
Paraphrase information

Original sentence: When it was first proposed that smoking should be banned in New Zealand prisons, prison officers declared that the outcome would be disruption and violence.

Stage One (rearranging the sentence structure): Prison officers, when they first heard of a proposed smoking ban in New Zealand prisons, declared that the outcome would be disruption and violence.

Stage Two (changing most of the words): Prison officers initially predicted that prohibiting smoking in New Zealand prisons would lead to unrest and riots.
Bring work to LSC

LSC one-to-one appointment with a learning advisor. We will teach you to improve your writing.

Phone 364 2314 to make the appointment.

Bring work printed out, double-spaced and in 12 point.