

concision

Most writers struggle with wordiness. Unnecessary or redundant words bore readers. They can also be distracting. This handout will help you write clearly and concisely.

Why Concision?

Concise writing helps your reader understand and maintain interest in your ideas. Editing for concision requires you to scrutinize your own work. In some instances, you may be able to remove words or sentences, while others might require you to reorganize our thoughts completely.

As you use the strategies below, ask yourself, “What am I trying to say?” and “Have I said it?”

Avoid Redundancy

Redundant Modifiers

A modifier is redundant if it is already implied in the word it modifies.

Redundant: The end result of the study showed various differences among participants.

Concise: The result of the study showed differences among participants.

Note: In this example, “result” already implies the end of the study, and “differences” already implies “variation.”

More examples: past history, basic fundamentals, terrible tragedy, final outcome, true facts, new beginning

Redundant Phrasal Verbs

A preposition within a phrasal verb is redundant if it is already implied by its verb.

Redundant: To avoid from plagiarizing, cite your work.

Concise: To avoid plagiarizing, cite your work.

More examples: return back to, penetrate into, circle around, to arrive at

Redundant Categories

Categorical terms are redundant if they are already implied by other parts of the sentence.

Redundant: Often times, mosquito bites are red in color and small in size.

Concise: Often, mosquito bites are red and small.

Note: In this example, “often” already implies “times,” “red” already implies “in color,” and “small” already implies “in size.”

More examples: faster speed, cheapest price, round shape, few in number

Redundant Pairs

Instead of using two similar words, use one.

Redundant: Each and every doctor ought to be competent, empathetic, and professional.

Concise: Every doctor ought to be competent, empathetic, and professional.

More examples: full and complete, hopes and desires, first and foremost, null and void, willing and able

Use Affirmatives

Writing in negative form requires the addition of the word “not.” When negatives are used repeatedly, the meaning may become unclear. Instead, write these sentences in the affirmative form.

Negative: Except when applicants have proof of residency, benefits will not be denied.

Affirmative: To receive benefits, applicants must have proof of residency.

Below is a table of affirmative alternatives to common negative forms.

Affirmative Alternatives	
Negative	Affirmative
Not admit	Deny
Not allow	Prevent
Not consider	Ignore
Not include	Omit
Not many	Few
Not often	Rarely

Simplify Phrases into Words

Often, phrases can be condensed or words can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence.

Wordy: Despite the fact that undocumented immigrants are detained, there are many that continue to cross the border.

Concise: Although undocumented immigrants are detained, many continue to cross the border.

On the next page is a table of single words that can replace wordy phrases.



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Simplified Phrases	
Word	Phrase
And	As well as
	In addition
	In combination with
	Together with
Because	Based on the fact that
	Due to the fact that
	Given that
	Inasmuch as
Can	Is able to
	Is in a position to
	Has the opportunity to
End	Bring to a close
	Call a halt to
	Come to a conclusion
	Put a stop to
If	As long as
	In situations in which
	On the condition that
	Provided that
Must	It is crucial that
	It is necessary that
	It is important that
Soon	Before long
	In a few moments
	In the not-so-distant future
	Presently
Throughout	For the duration of
	From beginning to end
	From start to finish
	Over the course of
Usually	As a general rule
	In most cases
	It is often the case that
	More often than not
	To a large degree

Prefer the Active Voice

Voice describes the relationship of the subject to the verb. There are two voices in English: the active and the passive. The difference is one of emphasis.

In the **active voice**, the subject performs the action of the verb; in the **passive voice**, the subject receives the action of the verb. The passive voice is formed using a form of the verb “be” and the past participle.

Active: We surveyed fifty high schools.

Passive: Fifty high schools were surveyed by us.

As you can see, the active voice is more concise and direct. Use the passive voice when you want to emphasize something is receiving an action or when the agent is unimportant (such as in your “Methods” section). Otherwise, use the active voice.

Note: For more information on active and passive voice, please see our “Voice” [handout](#).

Avoid Nominalizations

A **nominalization** is a **noun derived from another part of speech**, usually a verb. Verbs take objects; nouns do not. Instead, nouns employ prepositional phrases to do the equivalent work of a verb’s object. For this reason, sentences containing nominalizations tend to be longer. Use verbs and objects for actions instead of nouns and prepositional phrases.

Nominalizations: Our assessment of the damage lead to the conclusion that there was a failure in the structure.

Verbs: We assessed the damage and concluded that the structure failed.

Reduce Prepositional Phrases

Too many prepositional phrases can clog a sentence. Reduce as many as you can.

Wordy: After the 1-7 loss of Brazil to Germany in the 2014 World Cup, people demonstrated in the streets.

Concise: Street demonstrations followed Brazil’s 1-7 loss to Germany in the 2014 World Cup.

Eliminate prepositions by using possessives and adjectives.

Wordy: The opinion of the client matters.

Concise: The client’s opinion matters.

Note: For more information on prepositional phrases, please see our “Phrases” [handout](#).

Reduce Qualifiers

Qualifiers are words that modify (e.g., The research is somewhat comprehensive.) or intensify meaning (e.g., The research is very comprehensive). Excessive use of modifiers lengthens writing and makes it sound informal or uncertain.

Wordy: Social work is actually an interdisciplinary field that really advocates for vulnerable populations.

Concise: Social work is an interdisciplinary field that advocates for vulnerable populations.

More examples: kind of, basically, practically, generally, definitely, seemingly, sometimes, usually, apparently

Avoid Clichés and Idioms

Clichés are popular expressions that have lost their effectiveness. They are often also idioms, words or phrases that have a figurative meaning separate from their literal one. Either rewrite these phrases or remove them.

Wordy: Although it cost me an arm and a leg, completing dental school provided me with a window of opportunity to pursue my dreams.

Concise: Although it was expensive, completing dental school provided me with an opportunity to pursue my dreams.

Note: For more information on and examples of English idioms, please see our “Idioms” [handout](#).

References

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