



Avoiding Wordiness

How Do I Recognize Wordiness?

There are several causes of wordiness. This section contains explanations and examples of some causes that are most common. The section following will discuss some methods for reducing wordiness, along with examples to make your manuscript more concise.

Expletive Constructions

Writing the phrases “*It is,*” “*There is,*” “*There are,*” “*There were,*” or a similar phrase before the subject adds extra words and weakens the sentence. Avoid whenever possible.

Ex: There were flowers blooming everywhere.

Revised ex: Flowers were blooming everywhere.

Passive Voice

The subject of the sentence *receives* the action in passive voice, and uses more words. Change passive phrases, where the action is done “by” someone (making that someone or something the subject of the sentence), to active voice phrases, in which the doer of the action is the subject.

Ex: The door was opened by the butler, who politely invited me in.

Revised ex: The butler opened the door and politely invited me in.

Also, instead of using passive “to be” verb phrases like “was written” or “was changed,” change the verb entirely.

Ex: The boat was overturned in the violent storm.

Revised ex: The boat capsized in the violent storm.

Adjective Clauses

An adjective clause (such-and-such, *which was* such-and-such) can often be replaced with one descriptive word, or often the ‘which was’ can be taken out, and the rest left as it is.

Ex: The jacket, which is yellow, belongs to Mark.

Revised ex: The yellow jacket belongs to Mark.

Use verbs that convey action directly and avoid nouns formed by verbs. Examples of weak verbs are *be* and *have* because they do not communicate much action.

Ex: The business proposal submitted by Mr. Smith has to do with changes in Dalco's insurance policy.
Revised ex: The business proposal submitted by Mr. Smith outlines changes in Dalco's insurance policy.

In addition to looking for weak verbs, look for **nominals** (nouns derived from verbs, usually by adding suffixes such as *-ance*, *-ment*, or *-tion*). In many cases nominals just add redundancy—changing it back into a verb diminishes clutter and increases impact.

Ex: We organized the establishment of a peer group council.

Revised Ex: We established a peer group council.

What Can I Do to Make my Writing More Concise?

Repetition

Repetition is often referred to as redundancy. The goal is to deliver a concise message, not bore your audience. Edit your manuscript to show concise accentuation. It is more effective to use planned repetitions as opposed to unplanned repetitions which are colorless and drab.

Ex: The cheerleader squad choreographed a new cheerleader routine, but the coach rejected the routine.

Revised ex: The cheerleader squad choreographed a new routine, but the coach rejected the routine.

Empty Phrases

Establish conciseness by eliminating empty words and phrases.

Empty word or Phrase

Wordy example

Revision

as a matter of fact

As a matter of fact, the Bureau of Vital Statistics maintains demographic records for the United States.

The Bureau of Vital Statistics maintains demographic records for the United States.

Reducing Sentences to Clauses, Clauses to Phrases, and Phrases to Words

As you edit, check the manuscript for wordiness. Reducing a sentence to a clause allows the writer to combine two related sentences. This is an especially helpful technique when there are too many short, simple, subject-first sentences. Try combining short sentences, and clauses to be more concise.

Ex: The dog ran after the cat. The cat jumped the fence.

Revised ex: The dog ran after the cat, and the cat jumped the fence.

Double-Checking: Questions to Ask Yourself and Things to Look For

- Does your paper have sentences that unnecessarily start with “There is,” “It is,” or any other expletive construction?
- Did you eliminate all unneeded words that clutter your manuscript?
- Did you keep your meaning clear when you removed the clutter?

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