

HOW NOT TO USE A NEEDLESSLY EXCESSIVE AMOUNT OF WORDS TO WRITE OR COMPOSE WHAT YOU REALLY WANT TO EXPRESS OR COMMUNICATE WHEN YOU HAVE A WHOLE LOT TO WRITE OR COMPOSE (i.e. CONCISION)

Wordy or concise: Does it really make a difference?

Wordy sentences are ones that employ weak, awkwardly repetitive, or unnecessary words that needlessly complicate a sentence so that it becomes difficult to understand. Thankfully, you can replace these filler words with stronger and more effective phrases that restore meaning. In other words, concise writing is about **meaning**, not just the number of words used. A long sentence isn't necessarily wordy, nor is a short sentence necessarily concise. Instead, **writing concisely is about using the least amount of words possible to express the most accurate meaning.**

Follow these writing tips to avoid cluttering your sentences:

1. Use the active voice, not the passive voice: In the **active voice**, the subject of a sentence performs the action. In the **passive voice**, the subject is acted upon and *receives* the action (usually preceded by the word "by"). To discern the active voice, ask yourself *who* or *what* performs the action in your sentence. Once identified, make the person or thing that performs the action the subject of your sentence. For example:

- **Passive:** The kitten was helped out of the tree *by the fireman*.
- **Active:** *The fireman* helped the kitten out of the tree.

2. Avoid starting sentences with "There are/is/were" or "It is.": These constructions usually add more words, but no meaning. (Note, though, that starting sentences this way is not *always* wrong. You can start sentences like this when there would otherwise be no subject – e.g., There are 15 in the cupboard.)

- **Wordy:** There are three people in my class who think the world is flat.
- **Concise:** Three people in my class think the world is flat.

3. Avoid obvious or unnecessary details: Readers can fill in some details for themselves. For example:

- **Wordy:** Imagine a mental picture of someone engaged in the intellectual activity of trying to learn what the rules are for how to play the game of chess.
- **Concise:** Imagine someone trying to learn the rules of chess.

4. Avoid unnecessary determiners and modifiers:

-kind of	-definitely	-specific
-sort of	-actually	-particular
-type of	-generally	-basically
-really	-individual	-for all intents and purposes

- **Wordy:** This is definitely a type of communication strategy, but it is basically useless in noisy settings.
- **Concise:** This is a communication strategy, but it is useless in noisy settings.
- **More Concise (see point #2):** This communication strategy is useless in noisy settings.

Tips To Get You Started:

- Be direct and use fresh language. Do not rely on figures of speech or clichés to communicate your ideas.
- Make sure every word adds meaning to your sentence. Remove those that don't.

5. Limit your infinitive phrases: The infinite form of a verb is “to + verb” (to eat, to sleep). Instead, try using the active verb form (eats, sleeps).

- **Wordy:** The duty of a noble writer is to clearly communicate her ideas and to incite people to action.
- **Concise:** A noble writer communicates her ideas clearly and incites people to action.

Follow these editing techniques to de-clutter your sentences:

1. Replace imprecise or weak words with direct and strong vocabulary: Use a single word, or fewer words, that convey your meaning exactly.

In light of the fact = **because**

In the event that = **if**

In spite of the fact that = **although, though**

In the neighbourhood of = **about**

- Use a **thesaurus** to help find synonyms: words that have similar or the same meaning.
- You can use a thesaurus to employ concise words with accuracy.

2. Condense redundant pairs and categories: Some common phrases are redundant because one of the words contains the meaning of the other(s). In such cases, only the one word is necessary. Take, for example, “free gift”. By definition, a gift is free. Since adding *free* does not enhance the meaning of gift, it is unnecessary and redundant. Here are some more redundant pairs (taken from Purdue OWL):

-past memories

-final outcome

-round in shape

-various differences

-past history

-at an early time

-future plans

-large in size

-unexpected surprise

-end result

-often times

-period in time

- **Wordy:** This terrible tragedy of the crash in the economy brings back past memories of the period in time when the economy crashed in 1929.
- **Concise:** The current economic crash is so terrible that it reminds people of the 1929 economic crash.

3. Delete unnecessary *that, who, or which* clauses: If you change these clauses into phrases or single words, you will improve concision. For example:

- **Wordy:** All students who are in the Medieval Literature course must...
- **Concise:** Students in the Medieval Literature course must...

4. Combine sentences: Can you combine multiple sentences into one sentence without losing meaning? If so, combine them. Your writing will not only be more concise, but it will also flow better. For example:

- **Wordy:** The cat was orange. The cat was cute. The cat bit me!
- **Concise:** The cute, orange cat bit me!

5. Convert phrases into single words or adjectives: In the following examples, note how adjectives replace phrases.

- **Wordy:** The employee with ambition...
- **Concise:** The ambitious employee...
- **Wordy:** The new mayor who stepped into office temporarily...
- **Concise:** The interim mayor...