

## Strategies for Reducing Wordiness

Wordiness results from many sources. Many of us have learned to pad our writing with all sorts of empty phrases to reach length requirements for academic writing. Wordiness also tends to occur when we're struggling to clarify our ideas or when we're tired and not thinking clearly. Regardless of the reason for padded writing, we can achieve concise writing if we incorporate several strategies during the writing process and if we're aware of the individual patterns of wordiness typical of our own writing.

### Strategies for Eliminating Wordiness

You can eliminate wordiness in your writing if . . .

- You mark sections of your writing that you struggled to produce. If you had a hard time getting your ideas down on paper, chances are you included some "false starts" or filler phrases in your writing, something like the "ahems," "uhs," and "okays" that occur when we're speaking and formulating our ideas at the same time. This is natural. Don't worry about fillers when you're writing. But after you're done with your draft, pass through your paper once, focusing only on eliminating unnecessary language. Pay particular attention to sections you struggled to get out.
- Before editing, give yourself a breather. Even if you just get yourself a cup of coffee or work on something else for a while, getting away from your paper will help give you the distance you'll need to see what language is needed and what's not.
- Learn what wordiness patterns are typical of your writing. Most people tend to fall into two or three patterns of wordiness when they write. Learn what your patterns are, and edit with those patterns in mind.

### Patterns of Wordiness

As you read the following list, consider which patterns are typical of your writing:

**Omit the filler phrases "it is," "there is," and "there are" at the beginning of sentences; these often delay the sentence's true subject and verb.**

- **Wordy:** It is expensive to upgrade computer systems.
- **Concise:** Upgrading computer systems is expensive.

**Omit "this" from the beginning of a sentence by joining it to the preceding sentence with a comma.**

- **Wordy:** Chlorofluorocarbons have been banned from aerosols. This has lessened the ozone layer's depletion.
- **Concise:** Chlorofluorocarbons have been banned from aerosols, lessening the ozone layer's depletion.

**Change "which" or "that" constructions to an "-ing" word.**

- **Wordy:** The committee, which meets monthly, oversees accounting procedures and audits.
- **Concise:** The committee, meeting monthly, oversees accounting procedures and audits.

**Omit "which" or "that" altogether when possible.**

- **Wordy:** Because the fluid, which was brown and poisonous, was dumped into the river, the company that was negligent had to shut down.
- **Concise:** Because the brown, poisonous fluid was dumped into the river, the negligent company had to shut down.

**Replace passive verbs with active verbs. In passive constructions, the subject of the sentence is being acted upon; in active constructions, the subject is the actor.**

- **Wordy:** Rain forests are being destroyed by uncontrolled logging.
- **Concise:** Uncontrolled logging is destroying rain forests.

**Change "is" or "was" when they occur alone to a strong verb.**

- **Wordy:** A new fire curtain is necessary for the stage.
- **Concise:** The stage needs a new fire curtain.

**Replace "is," "are," "was," "were," or "have + an -ing word" to a simple present or past tense verb.**

- **Wordy:** The South African government was undergoing significant changes.
- **Concise:** The South African government underwent significant changes.

**Replace "should," "would," or "could" with strong verbs.**

- **Wordy:** The environmental council could see several solutions.
- **Concise:** The environmental council saw several solutions.

**Substitute strong verbs for "-tion" and "-sion" words whenever possible.**

- **Wordy:** I submitted an application for the job.
- **Concise:** I applied for the job.

**Replace prepositional phrases with one-word modifiers when possible.** Prepositional phrases, those little relationship words like "of," "from," "after," etc., tend to bring in a lot of "-tion" and "-sion" words too.

- **Wordy:** The President of the Student Senate was in charge of the lobbying against the merger at the Minnesota Congress.
- **Concise:** The Student Senate President oversaw lobbying the Minnesota Congress against the merger.

**Use a colon after a statement preceding a sentence of explanation, and leave out the beginning of the next sentence**

- **Wordy:** The theater has three main technical areas. These areas are costumes, scenery, and lighting.
- **Concise:** The theater has three main technical areas: costumes, scenery, and lighting.

**Combine two closely related short sentences by omitting part of one.**

- **Wordy:** The director is concerned about problems. Typical problems may occur with lighting, sound, and props.
- **Concise:** The director is concerned about typical problems with lighting, sound, and props.

Source: <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/style/wordiness.html>