

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

1. Omit 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

Patterns of Wordiness, cntd.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

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

Wordy

The environmental council could see several solutions.

Concise

The environmental council saw several solutions.

Patterns of Wordiness, cntd.

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

Wordy

I submitted an application for the job.

Concise

I applied for the job.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

AVOID WORDINESS

INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in terms of • when it comes to • as far as [X] is concerned 	regarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the fact that it doesn't have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • its lack of • its omission of
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at the present time • as of this writing • at the time of publication • at the current time • at this point in time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • now • currently 	in light of the fact that	considering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has the ability to • is able to • is capable of • has the capability to 	can	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comes with it right out of the box • comes equipped with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes • comes with • is preinstalled • is preloaded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the near future • not too long from now 	soon	it's important to note that	notably
the fact that	<i>(delete)</i>	in the direction of	toward
despite the fact that	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • although • even though 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less than great • less than spectacular • not very good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subpar • mediocre • OK
make a choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose • decide 	scrutinize very carefully	scrutinize
wander around aimlessly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wander • roam 	a lot of	many
due to the fact that	because	in the event that	if
more often than not	usually	have an impact on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • affect • influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the thing is that • the truth is that 	<i>(delete)</i>	have an effect on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • affect • influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be aware of the fact that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note • understand 	collide into each other	collide
crammed close together	crammed	insist adamantly	insist
tragically sad	tragic (or "sad")	tall skyscraper	skyscraper

AVOID WORDINESS

INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS
urban city	city	in a similar manner	similarly
a little bit	a bit (or a little)	the reason why is that	because
small bits	bits	the way in which	how
hotter temperature	hotter (or higher temperature)	the majority of	most
colder temperature	colder (or lower temperature)	there are times when	sometimes
once used to do	did (or used to)	precisely adjust	fine-tune
used to at one time	used to	more ways than one	multiple ways
deceptive lie	lie (or deception)	the time at which	when
ensure the largest amount	maximize	the place at which	where
specific to your wants and needs	customized	over the course of	throughout
features enough space on the inside to fully accommodate	fits	give the opportunity to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • let • allow
specific enough to say exactly	specify	provide the ability to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • let • allow
dark, black sky	black sky (or dark sky)	are representative of	represent
laptop computer	laptop	ensure the least amount	minimize
both agree	agree	used to in the past	used to
on sale for a discounted rate	discounted (or “on sale”)	cheaper price	cheaper (or lower price)
debut of a new product	product debut		

AVOID REDUNDANCY

INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS
as per	per	debris left behind	debris
share the same	share (or have the same)	slam forcefully	slam
still remain	remain	glide smoothly	glide
retain the same	retain	minor tweaks	tweaks
brief jaunt	jaunt	exactly word for word	exactly OR word for word (pick one)
both of them	both	end result	result
trailing behind	trailing	middle ground in between	middle ground
shrink smaller	shrink	grow larger	grow
have got (e.g., I've got)	have	describe in words	describe
factor that plays a role	factor	a variety of different things	a variety
specific details	details	tailored to fit	tailored
check and see	check	minute details	minutiae
notification alert	notification (or alert)	good-quality (<i>adj.</i>)	quality
whether or not	whether (<i>unless it means regardless of whether</i>)	in close proximity to	close to
annoyingly frustrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • frustrating • annoying 	pick and choose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pick • choose • select
reflect back on	reflect on	dry desert	desert
high up in	high in	far away from	far from
roasting in heat	roasting	forward progress	progress
elements that are a part of	elements	added bonus	bonus
how-to tutorials	tutorials	components that make up	Components
impacts that result from	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • impacts • results 	related to each other	Related
regress backward	regress	progress forward	progress

AVOID UNNECESSARY PREPOSITIONS

INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS
as per	per	by means of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by • via
share the same	share (or have the same)	by way of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by • via
beat out	beat	in excess of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than • over
start off	start	in order to	to
match up	match	in order for	for
head up	head	increase in size	grow
finish up	finish	decrease in size	shrink
enter into	enter	detrimentally affect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harm • hurt
exit out of	exit	morph for the worse	deform
depart	depart	come to an end	end
permeate through	permeate	in advance of	before
escape from	escape	lift up	lift
flee from	flee	apportion out	apportion
orbit around	orbit	emit out	emit
clean up	clean	cluster together	cluster
shout out	shout	soar up	soar
jump up	jump	spin around	spin
sit down	sit	escape from	escape
descend down	descend	plan out	plan
ascend up	ascend	fade away	fade
grab onto	grab	fill up	fill
click on	click	match up	match
tap on	tap	test out	test
raise up	raise	shift around	shift
lower down	lower	linger around	linger
leak out	leak	endure for <i>[length of time]</i>	endure <i>[length of time]</i>
help out	help	add together	add
fill up	fill	send out	send
empty out	empty	mail out	mail
sink down	sink	climb up	climb
rise up	rise	test out	test
last for <i>[length of time]</i>	last <i>[length of time]</i>		