

Writing Concisely

Students often assume that overly wordy sentences indicate an educated, elevated writing style. They think that the more difficult their work is to understand, the more intelligent they sound. This is not the case. The purpose of writing is to convey ideas, and clear, concise language best achieves this goal. The writer of clean English must examine every word that he puts on paper. He will find a surprising number that don't serve any purpose. Common wordiness woes can be found below.

- **Eliminate redundancies.** There is no need to say the same thing twice.
 - Wordy: What I am trying to say is that I think justice should be swift and sure.
 - Concise: I think justice should be swift and sure.
 - Wordy: Daniel is now employed at a private rehabilitation center working as a registered physical therapist.
 - Concise: Daniel now works at a private rehabilitation center as a registered physical therapist.

- **Avoid repeating words unnecessarily.**
 - Wordy: Our fifth patient, in room six, is a mentally ill patient.
 - Concise: Our fifth patient, in room six, is mentally ill.
 - Wordy: The best teachers help each student to become a better student both academically and emotionally.
 - Concise: The best teachers help each student to grow both academically and emotionally.

- **Cut empty or inflated phrases.** An empty phrase can be deleted with little or no loss of meaning.
 - Wordy: We will file the appropriate papers in the event that we are unable to meet the deadline.
 - Concise: We will file the appropriate papers if we cannot meet the deadline.
 - Wordy: Due to the fact that my car broke down, I cannot pick you up tonight.
 - Concise: Because my car broke down, I cannot pick you up tonight.

- **Simplify the sentence structure.** If a sentence structure is needlessly indirect, try simplifying it. Strengthen the verb where possible.
 - Wordy: It is important that hikers remain inside the park boundaries.
 - Concise: Hikers must remain inside the park boundaries.
 - Wordy: Edward is responsible for monitoring and balancing the budgets.
 - Concise: Edward monitors and balances the budgets.

- **Reduce clauses to phrases and phrases to single words.** Word groups functioning as modifiers can often be made more compact.
 - Wordy: Susan's stylish pants, made of leather, were too warm for our climate.
 - Concise: Susan's stylish leather pants were too warm for our climate.
 - Wordy: We took a side trip to Monticello, which was the home of Thomas Jefferson.
 - Concise: We took a side trip to Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson.

- **When possible, avoid the passive voice.** In the passive voice, the subject of the sentence receives the action instead of doing it. This can make sentences weak and unclear.
 - Wordy: The fly ball was caught by Hernando.
 - Concise: Hernando caught the fly ball.
 - Wordy: The pumps were destroyed by a surge of power.
 - Concise: A surge of power destroyed the pumps.

*Note: The passive is acceptable if one wishes to emphasize the receiver of the action or to minimize the importance of the actor.

- **Avoid turning verbs into nouns.** Verbs make sentences active and concise.
 - Wordy: There was a first a review of the evolution of the dorsal fin.
 - Concise: First, she reviewed how the dorsal fin evolved.
 - Wordy: Their cessation of hostilities was because of their personnel losses.
 - Concise: They ceased hostilities because they lost personnel.