

Strategies for Reducing Wordiness

What is wordiness?

Wordiness often occurs when writers use repetitive or redundant filler words to reach a certain page length. Deleting these words, thereby reducing wordiness, leads to a more concise paper. Concise writing uses the most effective words in a piece of writing, making the paper both more readable and understandable.¹

What can you do about wordiness?

First, read through your paper to determine the “wordy” sections. To find where your writing is repetitive, read the paper aloud to yourself, to a friend, or to a Writing Lab consultant. Read paragraph by paragraph, but remember to focus on individual sentences as well. Then, go through each of these parts using the following strategies to eliminate unnecessary words. You can strengthen your paper by using a combination of the following suggestions.

1. Use active, instead of passive verbs.²

Wordy: The athletes are being driven to their soccer practice by their coach.
Concise: The coach is driving the athletes to their soccer practice.

2. Avoid using “it is” or “there are” at the beginning of a sentence.²

Wordy: There are many people that visit the Writing Lab each semester.
Concise: Many people visit the Writing Lab each semester.

3. Do not use “which” or “that” unless necessary.²

Wordy: The event, which is held each year, brought together people from across the country.
Concise: The yearly event brought together people from across the country.

4. Use strong verbs instead of words like “is,” “were,” and “have” with a “-ing” word.²

Wordy: The university was undergoing a series of renovations.
Concise: The university underwent a series of renovations.

5. Use a strong adjective, instead of many vague ones.¹

Wordy: The writer used many extra words in his paper, instead of the absolutely essential ones.
Concise: The writer used more words in his paper than necessary.

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6. Combine sentences.^{1,2}

Wordy: The student was worried about her test grade. This was because she had not studied, and the exam was difficult.

Concise: The student was worried about her test grade because she had not studied, and the exam was difficult.

7. Eliminate unneeded qualifiers, such as *really*, *very*, *actually*, *extremely*, *probably*, *practically*, *somewhat*, *kind of*, *truly*, and *practically*.³

Wordy: The young boy, who was probably in kindergarten, was truly very thrilled about his birthday party.

Concise: The kindergartener was thrilled about his birthday party.

8. Replace unnecessary phrases with single words.³

Wordy: In the event that there is bad weather, such as rain, at the concert tonight, it will be held indoors where the concert will continue.

Concise: If there is bad weather tonight, the concert will be held indoors.

9. Change negative statements to affirmative ones.³

Wordy: If you do not have flour and sugar, you will not be able to bake the cake.

Concise: You will need flour and sugar to bake the cake.

Practice

Don't worry. After practicing, you will be able to reduce wordiness in your writing. Reference exercises 21-1 [A] and 21-1 [B] in the Writing Lab.

1. Purdue University Online Writing Lab. (2015). *Conciseness*. Retrieved from <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/572/01/>. Accessed on 18 February 2015.
2. St. Cloud State University Literacy Education Online. (2000). *Strategies for Eliminating Wordiness*. Retrieved from <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/style/wordiness.html>. Accessed on 18 February 2015.
3. The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Writing Center. (2014). *Writing Concisely*. Retrieved from <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/writing-concisely/>. Accessed on 18 February 2015.