

Economy in Writing

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Wordiness inhibits clarity by distracting the reader from your main ideas. Concise writing, by contrast, generally improves clarity and can be achieved through rewriting.

Writing Concise Sentences

To write clear and concise sentences, avoid nonessential phrases and clauses in the following ways.

Limit Modifying Phrases

Eliminate phrases that modify the noun but do not clarify the meaning of the sentence.

WORDY: My sister, **who's allergic to cats**, has a puppy.

CONCISE: My sister has a puppy.

The phrase “who's allergic to cats” distracts from the main idea of the sentence.

Minimize Prepositional Phrases

Avoid unnecessary prepositional phrases (preposition plus a noun).

WORDY: The assignment **on writing** is due next Friday by 5:00 p.m. **on my desk, in my office**.

CONCISE: The writing assignment must be on my office desk next Friday by 5:00 p.m.

Avoid Unnecessary Relative Clauses

Relative clauses begin with “that,” “who,” and “which.” When possible, change these clauses into single words, short phrases, or eliminate them altogether.

WORDY: The man **who ran for president** was a Democrat.

CONCISE: The presidential candidate was a Democrat.

Reword Infinitive Phrases

Eliminate infinitive phrases (“to” plus a verb) by using another form of the verb.

WORDY: The shortage of sale items in stock has caused customers **to become dissatisfied**.

CONCISE: The shortage of sale items in stock has dissatisfied customers.

Modify Other Phrases

Change wordy phrases into single words or direct expressions when possible.

WORDY: **At this point in time**, the ceremony will begin.

CONCISE: The ceremony will now begin.

Use Active Voice

Avoid passive-voice phrases by changing them to active voice.

WORDY: An account **was opened** by Mrs. Johns last week.

CONCISE: Mrs. Johns opened an account last week.

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Using Concise Words

Use Precise Words

Use one word that captures the main idea instead of multiple words that approximate it.

WORDY: The view was **pretty, nice, and interesting.**

CONCISE: The view was **breathtaking.**

The word “brehtaking” conveys the message more powerfully than the three words “pretty,” “nice,” and “interesting.”

Eliminate Extra or Empty Words

Avoid using extra or empty words to describe or introduce something. Empty phrases such as “It seems that” or “This paper will now” distract from your main point.

WORDY: **It has been said that** students who do their homework do better in school.

CONCISE: Students who do their homework do better in school.

“It has been said” is an empty phrase because it contributes no additional meaning to the sentence.

Avoid Inflated Writing

Use common and precise language whenever possible. Using overly academic language to impress readers often makes writing sound inflated.

WORDY: My **sanguineous** professor **disesteemed** my **election** of **grandiloquent** words.

CONCISE: My **wise** professor **disliked** my **choice** of **big** words.

Avoid Nominalization

Nominalization occurs when the action of a sentence is assumed by a noun. To avoid it, choose strong action verbs.

WORDY: The function of this handout is **to improve** wordy writing.

CONCISE: This handout **improves** wordy writing.

Omit Redundant Word Pairs

When using word pairs, look to see if both words are necessary.

WORDY: My **very favorite** class is photography.

CONCISE: My **favorite** class is photography.

The following are examples of redundant word pairs:

free gift	terrible tragedy	added bonus
various differences	end result	sudden crisis
each individual	clearly evident	unexpected surprise
future plans	final outcome	same identical
true facts	completely finish	basic fundamentals
important essentials	past memories	repeat again