

Concision: Some Strategies and Practice for Reducing Wordiness

The first step in editing your drafts for wordiness is to have some idea where you might look for awkward, incomplete, and wordy structures in your writing. The following list includes some suspicious words, phrases, and structures. Of course, not every occasion of the below examples will cause trouble for your reader; however, when you come across examples of the following words, phrases, and structures, you will want to consider the sentence(s) carefully.

- “You”—Almost always avoid the use of the second person in academic writing!
- “There/This/It” followed by a form of “to be”—contributes to awkward and wordy structures
- “Of”—Leads to wordy prepositional phrases
- “In”—Two problems
 - can lead to short prepositional phrases and
 - can make a sentence awkward when opening the sentence. (eg. “In this article it is stated that. . .” → “This article states that. . .”)
- “I”—usually contributes to wordiness when introducing a belief, claim or assertion.
- “The reason . . . is because . . .”—Removing “the reason” and “is” will usually lead to a more concise sentence
- Forms of “to be” and “to have”—Consider editing the sentence to make something happen.
- “By” followed by a gerund (an “-ing” noun) at the beginning of a sentence. (You can probably delete the pronoun, also.)

Once you have identified some areas in need of editing, you can start chipping away at the sentence(s). Get started with the following examples. The number in parentheses is the number of words in the passage. See how low you can go.

- The stadium has ample parking space available for fans’ automobiles. (10)
- There is no easy shortcut to learning how to play the game of bridge. (14)
- In the appendix in the back of the book you will find a complete list of all references to the author’s earlier previous works. (24)
- Let’s have a discussion on this particular issue sometime at a later date. (13)
- It is necessary for all of the fire extinguishers in the entire complex to be inspected on a monthly basis. (20)
- There were a number of very important issues that were brought up and thoroughly discussed in detail during the meeting. (20)

For longer passages, you will want to consider the purpose and audience. After reducing the wordiness, see if you can combine ideas in the two sentences into a single sentence.

- After reading an article called “Penny Pinching Shame,” I made many clear assumptions that women are not as deceitful or cheap as the magazine presents. The layout and three of the stories this article contains shows examples of how Cosmopolitan Magazine depicts women as being devious cheapskates. (48)
- A solution to solving this problem would be to develop a program that caters to the students staying on campus over the weekends. The program would focus on the activities and comfort of having students staying on campus over the weekends. (42)
- Dual enrollment isn’t within many school systems but should for a better way of obtaining education. The program could be a dramatically change for high school students. It could dramatically change the improvement in the rate of growth of preparation. (41)
- The ideal woman in a country music perspective is the image of being a sexual object, being a loving housewife, and serving to their man. Because this image of women is portrayed through country music, may women feel they have to live up to this “ideal” image. (48)