

WRITING CONCISELY



Concise writing uses the **fewest words necessary** to accurately convey an idea and should be the goal of every university-level writer. Writing concisely is challenging because it requires significant attention to detail regarding **word choice**, **sentence structure**, and **organization**. When achieved, concision increases a text's overall **clarity** and **persuasiveness**. This handout outlines a number of strategies you can use to achieve concision in your writing.



Early in the writing process, many writers need to focus more on getting their ideas down. You do not need to be overly concerned about **reducing wordiness** while drafting, but you should pay careful attention to the concision of your work while **revising** and **proofreading**.



Concision Strategies

Cut Meaningless Words and Phrases

One contributing factor to wordy writing is the addition of **unnecessary words, phrases, and ideas**. Here are some things to avoid:

Meaningless words and phrases

Avoid clichés, idioms, and colloquial (overly conversational) expressions.

Wordy e.g., Rather than **taking the bull by the horns**, she was **quiet as a church mouse**.

Concise e.g., She avoided **confrontation** by remaining **silent**.

Wordy e.g., The bridge is unstable **due to the fact that** it was constructed with inferior material.

Concise e.g., The bridge is unstable **because** it was constructed with inferior material.

Filler words, all-purpose words, and unnecessary qualifiers

Wordy e.g., **All things considered**, climate change should be given more attention, **in my opinion**.

Concise e.g., Climate change should be given more attention.

Wordy e.g., **Last but not least**, researchers found several connections between the subjects.

Concise e.g., **Lastly**, researchers found several connections between the subjects.

Vague words

Use specific wording whenever possible.

Wordy e.g., Engineering is comprised of many **aspects**.

Concise e.g., Engineering can be **subdivided into many disciplines**.

Wordy e.g., Historical context is an **important factor** to consider while writing literature reviews.

Concise e.g., Historical context **must be considered** while writing literature reviews.

Cut Unnecessary Repetition

You should avoid repetition in your writing because it disrupts the flow of your paper and can bore your reader. Here are some things to avoid:

Repetition of the same word within a sentence when used in two different ways

Wordy e.g., He received a **wound** from the clock while he **wound** it.

Concise e.g., The clock **injured** him while he **wound** it.

Wordy e.g., He was **right** to assume his subjects are **right**-handed.

Concise e.g., He **correctly** assumed his subjects are **right**-handed.

Redundancy of ideas

Wordy e.g., Subjects with **little technical training** tend to perform poorly due to their **lack of technical experience**.

Concise e.g., Some subjects' **lack of technical experience** resulted in poor performance.

Wordy e.g., **The reason** she moved is **because** she was offered a better position.

Concise e.g., She moved **because** she was offered a better position.

Words and phrases that express an idea that another word implies

Wordy e.g., **As already stated above**, beluga whales use sounds and echolocation to hunt in dark or turbid waters.

Concise e.g., **As stated above**, beluga whales use sounds and echolocation to hunt in dark or turbid waters.

Simplify Sentences

Where possible, you should ensure that your sentences are as clear and direct as possible. If you can eliminate words or phrases in your writing without disrupting or diluting meaning, you should consider doing so. Here are some things to avoid:

Expletive constructions (it is / there is / there are)

Wordy e.g., *It is challenging to read Shakespeare.*

Concise e.g., *Reading Shakespeare is challenging.*

Wordy e.g., *It is significant that a study of ethics complaints against social workers found that half of these involved violation of professional boundaries.*

Concise e.g., *Significantly, a study of ethics complaints against social workers found that half of these involved violations of professional boundaries.*

Verb and noun clusters

Replace verb + noun clusters with a single verb.

Wordy e.g., *The researchers **conducted an investigation of the effects** of caffeine on students writing timed examinations.*

Concise e.g., *The researchers **investigated the effects** of caffeine on students writing timed examinations.*

Unnecessary helping verbs

Eliminate unnecessary helping verbs.

Wordy e.g., *The teacher **could understand** why her students failed the test.*

Concise e.g., *The teacher **understood** why her students failed the test.*

Short but related sentences

Join short, related sentences with appropriate punctuation, such as a comma (or several commas).

Wordy e.g., *Many of his fabrications lay in plain sight for years. One of them was published in the respectable journal Science.*

Concise e.g., *Many of his fabrications, one of them published in the respected journal Science, lay in plain sight for years.*

Passive voice


Where possible and appropriate, use active voice in writing.

Wordy

e.g., The reaction **was catalyzed by** the introduction of light.

Concise

e.g., The introduction of light **catalyzed** the reaction.



There are some kinds of writing where passive voice may be appropriate. See our handout on passive and active voice for more information.

Rewrite Jargon

Jargon is **field- or discipline-specific language** that your reader may not understand. In deciding whether or not to keep specific terminology, consider your audience and their level of knowledge about your topic. Here are some things to avoid:

Convolutd/complex language

Use plain language wherever possible.

Wordy

e.g., The author's **expostulation impugns litterateurs of yore**.

Concise

e.g., The author's **argument disproves earlier scholars**.

Technical terminology without definition or explanation


When introducing technical terminology, it is generally appropriate to explain it the first time it is mentioned.

Wordy

e.g., The photographer **fixed the negative**.

Concise

e.g., The photographer **removed unexposed silver from the negative in a solution of chemicals, thereby "fixing" the image**.



Although the previous example's wordy version is shorter than the concise one, concision is as much about **clarity** as it is about length. Make sure that you are meeting your reader's needs in both content and structure.