



School of Liberal Arts

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Editing for Wordiness

"Words are like acid -- the more they're condensed, the more they burn."

"Burning" words don't have to be a bad thing -- effective writing is succinct enough that it engraves itself in the reader's memory. Eliminating excessive, confusing, or redundant words from your sentences can oftentimes make their meanings much clearer. Following are some examples of how you can "condense" -- and thus strengthen -- your writing.

USE ONE PRECISE WORD INSTEAD OF SEVERAL LITTLE WORDS.

- Wordy:** She was late *due to the fact that* her car broke down.
Revised: She was late *because* her car broke down.
- Wordy:** The train travels *at the rate of* sixty-five miles per hour.
Revised: The train travels *at* sixty-five miles per hour.
- Wordy:** My mom yells at me *as a means of* releasing her aggression.
Revised: My mom yells at me *to* release her aggression.

USE ACTIVE VOICE INSTEAD OF PASSIVE VOICE (BE + PAST PARTICIPLE)

- Passive:** The Great Gatsby *was written by* F. Scott Fitzgerald.
Active: F. Scott Fitzgerald *wrote* The Great Gatsby.
- Passive:** Their crops *were ruined by* the locusts.
Active: Locusts *ruined* their crops.

AVOID NOMINALIZATIONS (EXPRESSING ACTION WITH NOUNS INSTEAD OF VERBS)

- Wordy:** The *basis of the achievement of* your goal *is the development of* a positive attitude.
Revised: *To achieve* your goal, you must *develop* a positive attitude.

USE STRONG VERBS

- Wordy:** *To make a discovery* about how many people *felt it necessary to have* longer lab hours, I *made use of* a simple questionnaire.
Revised: *To discover* how many people *needed* longer lab hours, I *used* a simple questionnaire.

AVOID BEGINNING SENTENCES WITH "TO BE" PHRASES

("To be" phrases include expressions like "there are," "there is," "there were," "it is," and "it was.")

Wordy: *It was* her decision to become a banker.
Revised: She decided to become a banker.

Wordy: *There were* three options from which he could choose.
Revised: He could choose from three options.

AVOID REDUNDANCIES

Redundant: phrases like "past history," "blue in color," "playground area"
Revised: Use "history" instead of "past history" since history is *always* in the past.
Consider using only "blue" because it is obviously a color.
Use only "playground" since it is obviously an area.

Redundant: John did not need anyone's help. He could stand on his own two feet.
Revised: John could stand on his own two feet.
-or -
Revised: John was self-sufficient.

ELIMINATE "BUZZWORDS"

"Buzzwords" are vague, often abstract expressions that sound as if they mean something but are only "buzzing" or adding noise to your sentence without contributing anything of substance.

Wordy: *Those types of major* disciplinary problems are *really quite* difficult to solve.
Revised: Disciplinary problems are difficult to solve.

Wordy: *Basically,* she was *definitely* a *nice* person.
Revised: She was friendly.*

* *Kind, thoughtful, sweet, outgoing,* or any other more precise adjective could replace the vague word *nice*.