



Avoiding Wordiness

Wordiness causes readers to lose interest in the material, and professors may think students are attempting to increase the length of a work without providing enough information. There are several causes of wordiness; this handout contains explanations and examples of some of the most common problems.

Expletive* Constructions

Writing the phrases “*It is,*” “*There is,*” “*There are,*” “*There were,*” or something similar before the subject adds extra words and weakens the sentence. Avoid it whenever possible.

Ex: *There were flowers blooming everywhere.*

Revised ex: *Flowers were blooming everywhere.*

Passive Voice

The subject of the sentence *receives* the action in passive voice, generally resulting in extra words. Change passive voice phrases to active voice expressions. Let the subject perform the action.

Ex: *The door was opened by the butler, who politely invited me in.*

Revised ex: *The butler opened the door and politely invited me in.*

Also, change “be” or “was” verb phrases to concise versions of active verbs.

Ex: *The boat was overturned in the violent storm.*

Revised ex: *The boat capsized in the violent storm.*

Adjective Clauses

An adjective clause can often be replaced with one descriptive word.

Ex: *The jacket, which is yellow, belongs to Mark.*

Revised ex: *The yellow jacket belongs to Mark.*

Use verbs that convey action directly and avoid “to be” and other inactive verbs.

Ex: *The business proposal submitted by Mr. Smith has to do with changes in Dalco’s insurance policy.*

Revised ex: *The business proposal submitted by Mr. Smith outlines changes in Dalco’s insurance policy.*

* Although the word “expletive” has come to mean “curse word” in common language, here it refers to filler words that have little meaning or use.

In addition to looking for weak verbs, look for **nominals** (nouns derived from verbs, usually by adding suffixes such as *-ance*, *-ment*, or *-tion*). In many cases nominals just add redundancy—changing it back into a verb diminishes clutter and increases impact.

Ex: *They organized the establishment of a peer group council.*

Revised Ex: *They established a peer group council.*

Repetition

Repetition can make writing redundant. Deliver a concise message instead of boring the audience.

Ex: *The cheerleading squad choreographed a new cheerleader routine, but the coach rejected the routine.*

Revised ex: *The cheerleading squad choreographed a new routine, but the coach rejected it.*

Empty Phrases

Be concise; eliminate empty words and phrases.

Ex: *As a matter of fact, the Bureau of Vital Statistics maintains demographic records for the United States.*

Revised ex: *The Bureau of Vital Statistics maintains demographic records for the United States.*

Reducing Sentences to Clauses, Clauses to Phrases, and Phrases to Words

Check the work for wordiness. Reducing a sentence to a clause allows the writer to combine two related sentences. When there are too many short, simple, subject-first sentences, try combining short sentences and clauses to be more concise.

Ex: *The dog ran after the cat. The cat jumped the fence.*

Revised ex: *The dog ran after the cat, and the cat jumped the fence.*

Questions to Ask

- Are there unnecessary phrases such as “There is,” “It is,” or any other expletive construction?
- Have all unneeded words been eliminated?
- Is the meaning clear?