

How not to use a needlessly excessive amount of words to write or compose what you really want to express or communicate when you have a whole lot to write or compose...



Wordy or concise- does it really make a difference?

Wordy sentences are ones that employ weak, awkwardly repetitive, or unnecessary words to convey meaning. These filler words needlessly complicate a sentence so that it becomes difficult to understand. Thankfully, you can replace these fillers with stronger and effective words that restore meaning. Thus, concise writing is about **meaning**, not just the number of words used; a long sentence isn't necessarily wordy, nor is a short sentence necessarily concise. **Writing concisely, therefore, is about using the least amount of words possible to express the most accurate meaning.** Now that you know what concise writing is, how would you rename this worksheet?

TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

- **BE DIRECT AND USE FRESH LANGUAGE** instead of relying on figures of speech or clichés to communicate for you
- **INTERROGATE EVERY WORD** to ensure it adds meaning to a sentence

Follow these writing tips to avoid cluttering your sentences:

Use the active voice, not the passive one. In the **active voice**, the subject of a sentence performs the action. In the **passive voice**, though, the subject is acted on or receives the action. To fix this, ask yourself *who* or *what* performs the action. Once identified, make the person or thing that performs the action the subject of your sentence. For example,

Passive: The kitten was helped out of the tree by the firemen.

Active: The firemen helped the kitten out of the tree.

Avoid starting sentences with “There are/is/were” or “It is.” These constructions usually add more words, but no meaning. (Note, though, that starting sentences this way is not *always* wrong. You can start sentences like this when there would otherwise be no subject.)

Wordy: There are three people in my class who think the world is flat.

Concise: Three people in my class think the world is flat.

Avoid obvious or unnecessary details. Readers can fill in some details for themselves. For example:

Wordy: Imagine a mental picture of someone engaged in the intellectual activity of trying to learn what the rules are for how to play the game of chess.

Concise: Imagine someone trying to learn the rules of chess.

Avoid unnecessary determiners and modifiers. Common words/phrases that may be eliminated include:

- | | | |
|----------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| ·kind of | ·basically | ·individual |
| ·sort of | ·definitely | ·specific |
| ·type of | ·actually | ·particular |
| ·really | ·generally | ·for all intents and purposes |

Limit your infinitive phrases. The infinitive form of a verb is “to + verb” (to eat, to sleep). Instead, try using the active verb form (eats, sleeps).

Wordy: The duty of a noble writer is to communicate clearly her ideas and to incite people to action.

Concise: A noble writer communicates her ideas clearly and incites people to action.

Follow these editing techniques to de-clutter your sentences:

Replace several imprecise or weak words with a single word or fewer words that convey your meaning *exactly*. Thesauruses can help here.

In light of the fact = because

In the event that = if

In spite of the fact that = although, though

In the neighborhood of = about

Condense redundant pairs and categories. Some words entail the meaning of others or imply their categories. In such cases, only one word is necessary. Take, for example, free gift. By definition, a gift is free; since adding *free* does not enhance the meaning of gift, it is unnecessary and redundant. Here are some more redundant pairs (taken from Purdue OWL):

·past memories

·various differences

·future plans

·end result

·final outcome

·past history

·large in size

·often times

·round in shape

·at an early time

·unexpected surprise

·period in time

Wordy: This terrible tragedy of the crash in the economy brings back past memories of the period in time when the economy crashed in 1929.

Concise: The current economic crash is so terrible that it reminds people of the 1929 economic crash.

Delete unnecessary *that*, *who*, or *which* clauses. If you can change these clauses into phrases or single words, you will improve concision. For example,

Wordy: All students who are in the Medieval Literature course must...

Concise: Students in the Medieval Literature course must...

Combine sentences. Can you combine three sentences into one sentence without losing meaning? If so, combine them. Your writing will not only be more concise, but it will also flow better. For example,

Wordy: The cat was orange. The cat was cute. The cat bit me!

Concise: The cute, orange cat bit me!

Convert phrases into single words or adjectives. In the following examples, note how adjectives replace phrases:

Wordy: The employee with ambition...

Concise: The ambitious employee...

Wordy: The new mayor who stepped into office temporarily...

Concise: The interim mayo