

## Conciseness

Excess words and phrases can clog up your writing and make it less clear. Generally, there are two ways to eliminate wordiness:

- Compress what you mean into the fewest possible words.
- Don't tell your readers what they already know, don't need to know, or can infer.

Unfortunately, we can inflate our prose in so many ways that it is impossible to list them all, but the following suggestions should help you find the most common types of wordiness.

### **Redundant Pairs**

Many pairs of words imply each other. Finish implies complete, so *completely finish* is redundant. So are many other pairs of words:

past memories	sudden crisis
various differences	terrible tragedy
each individual	end result
basic fundamentals	final outcome
true facts	free gift
important essentials	past history
future plans	unexpected surprise

**Example:** Before the travel agent was completely able to finish explaining the various differences between all of the many vacation packages her travel agency was offering, the customer changed his future plans.

**Revised:** Before the travel agent finished explaining the differences between the vacation packages her travel agency was offering, the customer changed his plans.

### **Redundant Categories**

Specific words imply their general categories, so we usually don't have to state both. We know that time is a period, that pink is a color, that shiny is an appearance. Some redundant categories are included in the following phrases which, in every case, can drop the more general word:

large <i>in size</i>	<i>of an uncertain condition</i>
<i>of a bright color</i>	<i>in a confused state</i>
heavy <i>in weight</i>	unusual <i>in nature</i>
round <i>in shape</i>	extreme <i>in degree</i>
<i>at an early time</i>	<i>of a strange type</i>
<i>of a cheap quality</i>	economics <i>field</i>
honest <i>in character</i>	<i>area of mathematics</i>

**Example:** During that time period, many car buyers tended to prefer cars that were pink in color and shiny in appearance.

**Revised:** During that time, many car buyers tended to prefer pink, shiny cars.

### ***Meaningless Modifiers***

Some modifiers are delaying tactics that we use almost unconsciously. These words and phrases can be pruned away to make sentences clearer:

kind of	definitely
sort of	actually
really	generally
basically	individual
for all intents and purposes	specific

**Example:** For all intents and purposes, American industrial productivity generally depends on certain factors that are really more psychological in kind than of any given technological aspect.

**Revision:** American industrial productivity depends on factors that are more psychological than technological.

### ***Stating the Obvious***

Often we needlessly state what everyone knows or can infer from what we are writing.

**Example:** 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.

**Revised:** Imagine someone trying to learn the rules of chess.

### ***Excessive Detail***

Sometimes we provide irrelevant details or more information than readers need to know.

**Example:** Baseball, one of our oldest and most popular outdoor summer sports in terms of total attendance at ball parks and viewing on television, has the kind of rhythm of play on the field that alternates between the players' passively waiting with no action taking place between the pitches to the batter and exploding into action when the batter hits a pitched ball to one of the players and he fields it.

**Revised:** Baseball has a rhythm that alternates between waiting and explosive action.

### ***Phrases for Words***

Another kind of redundancy results from using phrases when a well chosen word or two will substitute.

**Example:** As you carefully read what you have written to improve your wording and catch small errors of spelling, punctuation, and so on, the thing to do before you do anything else is to try to see where sequences of subjects and verbs could replace the same ideas expressed in nouns rather than verbs.

**Revised:** As you edit, first find nominalizations you can replace with clauses.

### ***Verbs Smothered in Nouns***

Try to use a verb instead of a noun phrase.

**Example:** The committee made the decision to....

**Revised:** The committee decided to....

**Example:** They entered into an agreement to....

**Revised:** They agreed to....

### **Common Phrases**

Some common phrases that you can compress are the following:

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Use</i>
the reason for for the reason that due to the fact that owing to the fact that	because, since, why
in light of the fact that considering the fact that on the grounds that this is why on the occasion of in a situation in which	when
under circumstances in which as regards in reference to with regard to where _____ is concerned concerning the matter of	about
it is crucial that it is necessary that there is a need/necessity for	must, should
it is important that, cannot be avoided is able to, is in a position to has the opportunity to	can
has the capacity for has the ability to it is possible that there is a chance that it could happen that the possibility exists for	may, might, can, could

**Example:** It is possible that nothing will come of these preparations.

**Revised:** Nothing may come of these preparations.

### **Other Unnecessary Words**

There are many unneeded words that can simply be omitted, including the following:

- unnecessary articles (a, an, the)

**Example:** The evidence we have....

**Revised:** Evidence we have....

- unnecessary *that*, *who*, and *which* clauses

**Example:** All applicants who are interested in the job must....

**Revised:** All applicants interested in the job must....

-or-

All interested job applicants must....

- unnecessary there is and there are sentence beginnings

**Example:** There are four rules to observe....

**Revised:** Four rules to observe are....

- unnecessary passives

**Example:** An account was opened by Mrs. Sims.

**Revised:** Mrs. Sims opened an account.

- unnecessary infinitive phrases (infinitive phrase= to + verb)

**Example:** The duty of a clerk is to check all incoming mail and to record it.

**Revised:** A clerk checks and records all incoming mail.

(<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>).