

## Writing Concisely

Wordiness is one of the writing challenges that many of us face. It makes the writing difficult to read, causing loss of meaning and confusing sentences. Here are a few suggestions that could help you be more concise.

### Patterns to Avoid

To write concisely, you need to maximize the space that you use—the length of your paper for example—using as few words as possible to communicate what you are trying to say. Different writing styles and patterns make the text wordy.

#### 1. Redundant words/pairs

Redundant pairs are words that have the same meaning, and are usually used in conversational English. Examples include: first and foremost, each and every, and always and forever. These pairs should only be used when necessary to emphasize the meaning. However, it is more often than not that such use will not be necessary.

**Wordy:** It is accurate and true to say that each and every song can tell a story.

**Concise:** It is true that every song can tell a story.

#### 2. Unnecessary qualifiers and modifiers

Unnecessary qualifiers and modifiers are adverbs or expressions that are not necessary to convey meaning in a sentence. They are also called fillers. Examples include: actually, really, very, kind of, practically, etc. Some modifiers become unnecessary when the word they modify carry the complete meaning. For example, in the phrase “anticipate in advance”, “in advance” is an unnecessary modifier because “to anticipate” is to expect an event in advance of its occurrence.

**Wordy:** It is really important to emphasize that memories of a past event could bring joy to very many people.

**Concise:** It is important to emphasize that memories could bring joy to (many) people. [[Note here that keeping “many” is optional, only if emphasizing the multitude factor.]]

#### 3. Prepositional phrases

As the name suggests, prepositional phrases begin with a preposition, such as “in, of, for, from, on, at” etc. Replace such phrases with a word or a shorter expression to avoid making sentences wordy and unclear.

**Wordy:** The permission for accessing the confidential page from a computer off-campus is necessary for the beginning of the process.

**Concise:** Permission is necessary to access the confidential page on a remote computer.

#### 4. Common phrases that can be replaced with single words

We use common phrases in our academic writing, often for introductory purposes. A single word can replace such phrases, still producing the same meaning. Examples of such phrases include “due to the fact that” and “in the event that.”

**Wordy:** Due to the fact that some dogs enjoy going for long walks, it is important to note that owners need to be prepared for spending time outdoors.

**Concise:** Because some dogs enjoy long walks, owners should anticipate spending time outdoors. [[Note here that we deleted “it is important to note” because it does not add essential meaning to the sentence.]]

#### 5. Negatives that can be replaced with affirmatives

Using negatives requires the use of more words and can confuse the reader about the meaning of the sentence. Positives are clearer and more concise.

**Wordy:** Not paying attention to one’s workload would not allow them to properly manage their time.

**Concise:** Paying attention to one’s workload allows them to properly manage their time.

#### 6. Passive voice

The passive voice occurs when the subject of the verb or action is used as object, and the object as subject; it also involves the use of verb to be (is/was/has been) followed by the participle of the verb. For example: The ball was kicked by the player. Here the player is the doer of the action, and the ball is the object; however, the object is acting as subject in this passive voice sentence. The use of passive voice tends to be confusing for readers, especially when the subject (doer of action) is important to the meaning of the sentence. Using the active voice reduces wordiness as well as ambiguity, thus rendering your writing clear and concise.

**Wordy:** The car was checked by the mechanic and the report was published by the garage manager.

**Concise:** The mechanic checked the car and the garage manager published the report.

#### **A few more quick tips:**

- Be specific
- Only use words that carry important meaning to the sentence
- If possible, combine sentences. This approach might be tricky because you risk falling for the run-on sentence trap.

#### **Useful resources:**

Blank, G. Kim. “Wordiness, Wordiness, Wordiness List.”

<http://web.uvic.ca/~gkblank/wordiness.html>

#### **Sources consulted:**

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/conciseness-handout/>

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/academic\\_writing/conciseness/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/conciseness/index.html)