



APSU Writing Center

Conciseness

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(Resource: *The Writer's Harbrace Handbook*, 3rd edition)

Conciseness focuses on conveying thoughts clearly and efficiently to promote the readers' understanding. This does not mean that the sentences are short, but rather that the writer chooses his/her words wisely, carefully, and intentionally.

Eliminate wordiness and redundant words and phrases.

- After the first draft, review your paper to make sure that you are not being vague or repetitive.
- Restating an important point using different words is okay, but rephrasing readily understood terms can be redundant (repetition for no good reason).
 - **Example:** I took my cat to the vet *who was an animal doctor*.
 - Though the example is silly, the italics section is obviously not necessary and is, therefore, redundant.
- Also avoid grammatical redundancy: double subjects (my sister *she is*), double comparisons (*more easier than*), and double negatives (*couldn't hardly*).
- Omit the following redundant pairs of words that imply each other:
 - past history
 - basic fundamentals
 - final outcome
 - true facts
 - terrible tragedy
 - future plans
 - free gift
 - past memories
 - various differences
 - end result
 - sudden crisis
 - each individual
 - important essentials

Delete unnecessary words and recast wordy phrases.

- **Example:** I went to see *a person who gives expert advice*. (consultant)
- Watch for empty or vague words such as area, aspect, element, factor, feature, field, kind, situation, thing, and type (may signal wordiness)

Avoid words such as *just*, *very*, *really* unless they are absolutely necessary

- (they rarely add anything significant to a story or argument).
- **Example:** I *really* want to be a teacher. → I want to be a teacher.
- **Example:** I *just* wish that I had a piece of chocolate. → I wish I had a piece of chocolate.

For clarity of descriptive sentences, the following words and phrases should be eliminated from use:

- kind of
- a lot
- generally
- really
- just
- sort of
- individual
- type of
- specific
- actually
- even
- basically
- particular
- definitely
- extremely
- very
- especially
- somewhat
- what
- thing/something



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For clarity and brevity, eliminate redundant categories that describe shape, size, and number.

- **Example:** He was in a *confused state*. → He was confused.
- **Example:** She was *honest in character*. → She was honest.

In the following redundant phrases, delete the general category term and leave the specific descriptive word:

- of a strange type
- economic field
- at an early/late time
- large/small in size
- of a bright/dull color
- unusual in nature
- extreme in degree
- in this day and age
- for the purpose of
- on a daily basis
- of cheap/expensive quality
- honest/dishonest in character
- often times/oftentimes
- in a confused state
- heavy/light in weight
- period in time
- round/flat in shape
- of an uncertain condition
- in order to
- nowadays
- in my opinion I think that at this point in time
- due to the fact that

Certain words need to be followed by a noun for clarity.

- The following are examples: this, that, these, those, few, many, all, every, each, several, most, etc.
 - **Example:** *This* was a poor idea. → *This idea* was poor.
 - **Example:** *Many* do not follow directions the first time. → *Many student drivers* do not follow directions the first time.

Avoid the use of expletives *it* and *there* when they do not refer to any particular thing or person.

- Instead, restructure the sentence or identify to what or whom *it* and *there* refers.
 - **Example:** There are three students in the classroom. → Three students are in the classroom.
 - **Example:** It is crazy that school was cancelled. → That school was cancelled is crazy.

To prevent wordiness and promote clarity, avoid verbs that are nonspecific and reflect passive voice.

- To strengthen writing, use verbs that state clear meaning and thus prevent the use of -ion, -ance, and -ence nouns.
 - **Example:** She has *an abhorrence* to loud noises. → She *abhors* loud noises.



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To strengthen writing, use verbs that best describe and define meaning.

- The verbs *make*, *get*, *let*, *have*, and *had* are often overused when better verbs should be used.
 - **Example:** I am going to college to *get* an education so I can *make* more money. → I am going to college to *obtain* an education so I can *earn* more money.
 - **Example:** Odysseus traveled a great distance to *make it* home. → Odysseus traveled a great distance *towards* home.
 - **Example:** I *had* a cold for a week. → I *suffered* a cold for a week.

Elevate writing past elementary levels through choices of words that best clarify meaning.

- Avoid words such as *nice*, *good*, *bad*, *interesting*, and *unique* when these words are open to readers' interpretation (often the opposite of the writer's intent) and convey little meaning.
 - **Example:** I thought the food at that restaurant was *bad*. → I thought the food at that restaurant was *cold*, and the hamburger seemed to be *spoiled*.
 - **Example:** Last night's movie was *interesting*. → The plot of the movie was *captivating because of its unexpected and unusual storylines*.

Avoid broad and general verbiage.

- especially with the use of words such as *something*, *thing(s)*, and *what*. Use words that specifically identify what or whom is being discussed.
 - **Example:** I see *what* you mean. → I understand *the concept* of your thoughts.
 - **Example:** *Something* is wrong with the car. → The car *continually vibrates* when I accelerate.

For formal and informal papers, avoid colloquial expressions, clichés, slang language, internet-speak, and informal language.

- In order to write for clarity, these expressions and informal forms of writing must be avoided so the reader will be able to understand meaning.
 - **Example:** He needs to *step up* and *be a man*. → He needs to *mature* and *act like an adult*.
 - **Example:** When it comes to doing *things* the right way, she *takes the cake*. → *Regarding Janelle's ability to think or act, she continually uses poor judgment and displays irrational behavior.*