

Eliminating Wordiness

Although adding words helps fill pages, information that doesn't advance the paper cheapens the quality of the piece. Keeping your paper concise strengthens its clarity and gives it a smooth flow.

Here are some tips to help keep your writing to the point:

1. Weak words

The written equivalent of "um." Filler words don't provide content, and they disrupt the flow of the sentence.

EX: *Generally speaking*, students can *basically* use anything to do research.
REVISION: Students can use anything to do research.

Examples: *Kind of, actually, really, practically, generally, etc.*

2. Repeated meanings and unneeded synonyms

Paired words may be redundant.

EX: If her account is *true* and *accurate*, he was the one who stole it.
REVISION: If her account is *true*, he was the one who stole it.

Examples: *each & every, true & accurate, first & foremost, terrible tragedy, controversial issue, true facts, etc.*

3. Phrases that can be replaced by single words

If you can think of one word to replace several, use it.

EX: If I ever *come back* to visit, we can *think about* it.
REVISION: If I ever return to visit, we can consider it.

4. Monologue phrases

Injecting notes about structure, spurring audience reaction, or clarifying intent may interfere with your main point.

EX: *As we have seen*, the statistics contribute to *what some may call* an issue.
REVISION: The statistics contribute to the issue.

5. Caginess

Lack of confidence in your writing can also lead to wordiness.

EX: *It is possible* this may be true.
REVISION: This may be true.

Examples: *It seems like, it is possible that, etc.*

6. Nonessential information

If the information about *who*, *when*, and *where*, does not advance your point, it is unnecessary.

EX: When I took the class *in May of last year*, I received an A.
REVISION: When I took the class, I received an A.

7. Change negatives to affirmatives

When possible, replace the negative phrase with one word. Think of antonyms for the word in the sentence. Your sentence will be much clearer.

EX: There are *not many* examples that are interesting.
REVISION: There are *few* examples that are interesting.

Examples: *not many*=few, *not stop*=continue, *not notice*=overlook, *not include*=omit, *not different*=similar, *not the same*=different, *not allow*=prevent, *etc.*

8. Avoid beginning sentences with “it is,” “there is,” and “there are”

Avoid these phrases unless you are introducing a new topic in your sentence or emphasizing the idea following these phrases.

Note this improvement of the previous example:

EX: *There are* few examples that are interesting.
REVISION: Few examples are interesting.

9. Avoid unnecessary or overuse of “be” verbs (am, is, are, was, were).

“Be” verbs are common but not always necessary. Delete them when possible to create a stronger and more direct sentence.

EX: The examples *are* interesting to me.
REVISION: The examples interest me.