



## ELIMINATING WORDINESS

### WHAT IS WORDINESS?

The wordy definition: The situation of wordiness is one in which writers attempt to utilize several words or extravagant words in the place of a few, well-chosen, concise, and less ambiguous words. The clearer definition: Wordiness means “using more [words] than necessary to express thought” (Merriam-Webster’s 1363). Readers find wordy papers difficult to follow.

- 1 Wordiness is a result of idea generation. Most people write wordy sentences and paragraphs when they are writing early drafts. In final drafts, however, writers need trim those wordy passages.
- 2 Many people write wordy papers because they are trying to make their ideas sound important by using long words and intricate sentences. They think that their writing must be complicated to seem professional. Although these writers are trying to impress their readers, they often end up confusing them. The best writing is clear, concise, and easy to understand. Your ideas are much more impressive when your reader does not have to fight to understand you.
- 3 When a writer can’t find the “perfect” word, s/he often ends up putting a long phrase in its place. Some wordiness, then, is the result of a writer’s frustration at not being able to find that perfect word.
- 4 Finally, passive sentences and other constructions that hide the subject are often wordy. For example, the passive sentence, “The cat was eaten by the dog,” has many more words than the active sentence “The dog ate the cat.” One passive sentence is OK; a paper full of passive sentences is full of extra words.

### HOW TO AVOID WORDINESS

- 1 Revise! Don’t be afraid of wordiness in drafts. Write down what you need to write down at first. Then, in revision, go through your paper carefully, cutting unnecessary sentences, phrases, and words.
- 2 Have confidence in your ideas. You don’t need to make them sound more complex than they really are. Say what you mean completely but concisely; your reader will thank you.
- 3 Write out loud! That is, say what you’re writing out loud as you write it. Most people don’t speak in a wordy way, so if you can say what you mean, transfer it directly on to the page or screen. Sometimes it’s easier to find that “perfect” word by talking through several choices.
- 4 Avoid passive constructions. You can write a passive sentence down and then change it. Find the person or thing in the sentence that is doing the action and make it the subject. For example, the thing doing the acting in the sentence “The cat was eaten by the dog” is the dog. Make “the dog” the subject: “The dog ate the cat.”
- 5 Use the active verbs rather than forms of “to be.” For example, change “It is difficult in situations when every sentence in a paper is marked “wordy” to “Students panic when their teachers mark every sentence in a paper as wordy.”

### METHODS OF ELIMINATING WORDINESS

#### **1. Eliminate unnecessary articles (a, an, the)**

##### Wordy

The evidence we have...

Balancing the sales by Friday is an impossibility without any kind of extra help

##### Concise

Evidence we have...

Balancing sales by Friday is impossible without extra help.

## 2. Change prepositional phrases into one word modifiers

### Wordy

The employee with ambition...  
The department of marketing...  
Jeff Converse, our chief of consulting, suggested at our last board meeting the installation of microfilm equipment in the department of data processing.

### Concise

The ambitious employee...  
The marketing department  
At our last board meeting, Jeff Converse, our chief consultant, suggested we install microfilm equipment in our data processing department.

## 3. Delete unnecessary “that,” “who,” and “which” clauses

### Wordy

The report that discussed...  
All applicants who are interested in the job must...  
The system which is most efficient and accurate...

### Concise

The report discussing...  
All job applicants must...  
The most efficient and accurate system...

## 4. Avoid overusing “it is,” “there is,” and “there are” (weak expletives) at the beginning of sentences

### Wordy

It is important that we agree.  
There are four rules which should be observed:...

### Concise

We must agree.  
Four rules should be observed...

## 5. Use active rather than passive verbs

### Wordy

An account was opened by Mrs. Simms.  
Your figures were checked by the research department.

### Concise

Mrs. Simms opened an account.  
The research department checked your figures.

## 6. Rescue verbs that are smothered in nouns

### Wordy

The function of this department is the collection of accounts.  
He made the statement that he agreed with the concept that inflation could be controlled.

### Concise

This department collects accounts.  
He agreed that inflation could be controlled.

## 7. Delete unnecessary infinitive phrases (Infinitive=To+Verb)

### Wordy

The duty of a clerk is to check all incoming mail to record it.  
A shortage of tellers at the Calumet branch, Northern Indiana Bank, on Friday and Saturday during rush hours has caused customers to become dissatisfied with our service.

### Concise

A clerk checks and records all incoming mail.  
A teller shortage at the Calumet branch, Northern Indiana Bank, on Friday and Saturday during rush hours has caused customer dissatisfaction.

## 8. Replace jargon with conversational words

### Wordy

At this point in time...  
Due to the fact that...  
In accordance with your request...

### Concise

Now...  
Because...  
As you requested...

## 9. Omit words that explain the obvious

### Wordy

I received your inquiry yesterday. Yes, we do have...  
It goes without saying that we are acquainted with your policy on filing tax returns, and we have every intention of complying with the regulations which you have stated.

### Concise

Yes, we do have...  
We intend to comply with the tax return regulations you have stated.

## 10. Omit words which repeat, which add nothing to your message except words

### Wordy

I would appreciate it if you would bring to the attention of your drafting officers the Administrator’s dislike of long sentences and paragraphs in messages to the field and in other items drafted for her signature or approval, as well as in all correspondence, reports, and studies. Please encourage your staff to keep their sentences short.

### Concise

Please encourage your drafting officers to keep sentences and paragraphs in letters, reports, and studies short. Dr. Lomas, the Administrator, has mentioned reports and memos drafted for her approval recently have been wordy and hence time consuming.