



The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Clarity and Concision

This handout covers three strategies that can make your writing more concise:

1. Eliminating redundancies
2. Eliminating writing zeroes
3. Reducing sentences to their simplest form.

The key to writing concisely is not necessarily changing the way you write, but improving the way you edit. The last section of this handout provides some tips on editing for clarity and concision.

Eliminate Redundancies

It's natural to say the same thing twice but in different words. The following are examples of redundant phrasing. The unnecessary words are in parentheses because they are already implied by the other words.

(already) existing	introduced (a new)	(empty) space
(alternative) choices	mix (together)	start (out)
at (the) present (time)	never (before)	had done (previously)
(basic) fundamentals	none (at all)	(still) persists
(completely) eliminate	now (at this time)	(end) result
(continue to) remain	period (of time)	(final) outcome
(currently) being	(private) industry	(currently) underway
(separate) entities	(various) differences	each (individual)

Eliminate Writing Zeroes

Writing zeroes are phrases that offer almost no meaning or valuable information. Whenever possible, omit these from your writing.

- The presence of
- As a matter of fact it should be pointed out that
- I/we might add that It is noteworthy that
- In the course of
- It is significant that
- The fact that
- It is interesting to note that

Reduce Sentences to Their Simplest Forms

As you revise, try to convey necessary information to your reader in the most direct way possible by including only necessary words. In order to keep sentences simple, trim down circumlocutions: roundabout or indirect ways of speaking. Also, consider omitting or reducing prepositional phrases, verb phrases, adjectives, adverbs, and needlessly complex words.

CIRCUMLOCUTIONS

Similar to writing zeroes, circumlocutions convey ideas in verbose language, but unlike writing zeroes, they still have the potential to add meaning to your writing—they just need to be simplified. Below is a list of circumlocutions that can often be replaced with a single word.

Bulky

At this point in time

At that point in time

Has the ability to

Has the potential to

In light of the fact that

In the event that

In the vicinity of

Owing/due to the fact that

The question as to whether

There is no doubt but that

Trim

now

then

can

can

because

if

near

because

whether

no doubt

MORE CIRCUMLOCUTIONS

The reason for For the reason that Considering the fact that On the grounds that This is why	=because, since, why
On the occasion of In a situation in which Under circumstances in which	=when
it is crucial that it is necessary that there is a need/necessity for it is important that cannot be avoided	=must, should
is able to has the opportunity to has the capacity for	=can

as regards in reference to with regard to concerning the matter of where _____ is concerned	=about
it is possible that there is a chance that it could happen that the possibility exists for	=may, might, could

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

[begin with...] with of, in, at, on, for, through, over..

VERB PHRASES

Bulky

are aware of/have knowledge of
are taking
are indications/indicative of
are suggestive of
can be compared to

Trim

know
take
indicate
suggest
resemble

ADJECTIVES & ADVERBS

Adjectives: Comprehensive, detailed, fundamental, specific, particular, somewhat, kind of, sort of, type of...

Adverbs: Very, really, basically, definitely, actually, practically, generally

NEEDLESSLY COMPLEX WORDS

Category	Example	Possible Substitute
Nouns	Familiarization Utilization	Familiarity Use
Verbs	Facilitate Finalize Utilize	Cause Finish/End Use
Adjectives	Individualized	Individual
Adverbs/Prepositions	Firstly, secondly, thirdly Heretofore	First, second, third Previous

	Hitherto Therewith Amongst	Until now With Among
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NOMINALIZATIONS

Nominalizations are verbs turned into nouns. Oftentimes, nominalizations bring unnecessary adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases with them. Instead of using the nominalized form of a word, find the action (the verb) buried in the noun and use that instead.

For example: “establish” instead of “establishment.” It might require restructuring your sentence, but it will make your writing stronger and more concise.

Nominalization	Verb
Establishment	Establish
Measurement	Measure
Development	Develop
Collection	Collect
Discovery	Discover
Movement	Move
Reaction	React
Completion	Complete
Failure	Fail
Refusal	Refuse
Discussion	Discuss
Investigation	Investigate

Editing Tips for Clarity and Concision

Tip 1: Dedicate one read-through solely to cutting. No additions allowed.

Tip 2: Use the Find/Search feature of your word-processing program to hunt down wordiness

Tip 3: Search for and circle:

- Redundancies and Zeroes you know you’re prone to
- Any instance of expletives (it + be or there + be)
- Any preposition beginning a phrase
- Adverbs, especially ‘very’ and ‘really’