



The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Clarity and Concision

Strong writing is concise writing. This handout covers three strategies that can make your writing more concise: 1) eliminating redundancies, 2) eliminating writing zeroes, and 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.

1. 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)

2. 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	

3. 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.

3A. 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.

<u>Bulky</u>	<u>Trim</u>
At this point in time	now
At that point in time	then
Has the ability to	can
Has the potential to	can
In light of the fact that	because
In the event that	if
In the vicinity of	near
Owing/due to the fact that	because
The question as to whether	whether
There is no doubt but that	no doubt

3B. 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

3C. PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES:

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

3D. VERB PHRASES:

<u>Bulky</u>	<u>Trim</u>
are aware of/have knowledge of	know
are taking	take
are indications/indicative of	indicate
are suggestive of	suggest
can be compared to	resemble

3E. ADJECTIVES & ADVERBS:

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

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

3F. 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 Hitherto Therewith Amongst	First, second, third Previous Until now With Among

3G. 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

4. 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'