

Writing Concisely

Concision refers to the ability to write in such a way that we convey our message as directly and succinctly as possible. Concision goes hand-in-hand with **clarity**, our ability to convey our message to our audiences in a way that is easy for them to understand. This resource explains several strategies for writing more concisely. Of course, our writing tutors can also help you revise your writing for concision!

Avoid Word-Level Redundancy

Revise any adjective + noun combinations for which the noun already assumes the adjective. Examples:

- added bonus → **bonus** (all bonuses are added)
- free gift → **gift** (all gifts are free)
- accidental mistake → **mistake** (all mistakes are accidental)
- horrible disaster → **disaster** (all disasters are horrible)

Note: There may be instances where it is rhetorically advantageous to use word-level redundancy for emphasis, especially in creative writing. However, in general, concise writing will strive to eliminate these redundant word pairings.

Replace Wordy Phrases With Shorter Alternatives

Many writers are tempted to use wordy, cumbersome phrases in an attempt to sound more formal or “official.” However, these often backfire, as they impede the clarity of the writing. Revise these into more concise, direct versions to achieve greater clarity. Examples:

- due to the fact that → **because**
- at the present time → **now**
- in the even that → **if**
- until such time as → **until**

Avoid Filler Phrases With Empty Meanings

Similarly, many writers feel compelled to “fluff up” their writing with empty phrases that only add unnecessary length to the writing. Try to eliminate these from your writing as you revise for concision. Examples:

- please be aware that
- it is important to note that
- I am writing to inform you that
- please do not hesitate to

In General, Use the Active Voice Over the Passive Voice

Since the passive voice requires you to use “to be” + the past participle form of a verb, as well as the word “by,” it is naturally a few words longer than the active voice. Therefore, when revising for concision, consider using the active voice over the passive voice in most instances. Examples:

- The dog was chased by the cat. → **The cat chased the dog.**
- Mistakes were made by the president. → **The president made mistakes.**
- The assignment was completed by the students. → **The students completed the assignment.**

Note: There may be rhetorical reasons that you would want to use the passive voice over the active voice despite its added length. For example, in many genres, such as scientific reports, it is rhetorically effective to use the passive voice

to foreground the research and minimize the role of the researcher. See our resource on active vs. passive voice here: [LINK](#)

Avoid Nominalizing Verbs

Nominalization refers to converting verbs into nouns. These nouns, which often end in –tion, -ment, or a similar suffix, tend to be quite long, so consider keeping them as verbs when you revise for concision. Examples:

Not concise: **The board's recommendation is the consideration of the development of software.**

Concise: **The board recommends developing software.**

Avoid Strings of Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases are strings of words that begin with a **preposition**, a word that usually indicates direction, position, location, or time. Common prepositions include:

-in	-above	-during	-of	-toward
-on	-below	-after	-from	-between
-at	-around	-before	-to	-under

Writers attempting to add length to their writing will often use too many prepositional phrases, which only impedes their clarity. This often occurs alongside the nominalization problem mentioned above. When you revise for concision, be aware of unnecessary prepositional phrases that could be omitted or perhaps replaced with a **possessive noun**. Example:

Not concise: **The construction of the house took place in the month of March.**

More concise: **The house's construction took place in March.**

Even more concise: **The house was constructed in March.**

Even more concise: **The house was built in March.** (why use the bigger word if we don't have to?)

Even more concise: **We built the house in March.** (it's the same word count but in active voice rather than passive voice; therefore, it's more direct and clear to readers)

Avoid Unnecessary Modifiers

Modifiers are words like adjectives and adverbs that can be used to add more information about a noun or verb, respectively. These can often be very descriptive and useful for adding important details about nouns and verbs. However, when you revise for concision, consider omitting unnecessary modifiers that don't add anything important to your message. Examples:

Not concise: **I truly hope that you will seriously consider this very humble proposal.**

Concise: **I hope you will consider this proposal.**

Note: "That" is a word that is often unnecessarily added to our writing; example: **"I believe that there are reasons that we should move."** Revision: **"I believe there are reasons we should move."** When you revise for concision, look for opportunities to omit unnecessary instances of "that." Note, however, that not every instance of "that" will call for revision; example: **"I know that girl over there"** (omitting "that" in this case will make the sentence ungrammatical and unclear to readers). As always, context is everything when it comes to writing!

This resource was prepared by the Cottey College Writing Center.

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