

Conciseness

APSU Writing Center Handout

Conciseness is writing that conveys ideas clearly and efficiently to improve reader understanding by choosing words wisely and intentionally.

A common issue is "instant prose," which results from artificially inflating content to meet length requirements. This can lead to wordiness and redundancy, which weaken the clarity of writing.

Strategies for Writing Concisely

- Write exactly what you mean, no more, no less.
- Respect yourself as a writer and trust that your ideas are clear without unnecessary repetition.
- Review your first draft to identify words to delete or phrases without losing meaning.
- Read paragraphs aloud to ensure that all sentences support the topic sentence.
- Keep concrete, specific examples and eliminate extra words, empty phrases, weak qualifiers, and unnecessary "to be" verbs.

Common Issues and How to Fix Them

1. Eliminating Weak Intensifiers and Qualifiers

- Sentences are more forceful without unnecessary qualifiers:
- We found the proposal [**quite**] feasible. → We found the proposal feasible.
- That behavior is [**fairly**] unique. → That behavior is unique.

2. Avoiding Wordiness and Redundant Phrases

Redundant categories (delete the general category term and keep the specific word):

- He was in a confused state. → He was confused.
- She was honest in character. → She was honest.

Common redundant pairs to avoid:

Past history → History

Basic fundamentals → Fundamentals

Final outcome → Outcome

True facts → Facts

Terrible tragedy → Tragedy

Future plans → Plans

Free gift → Gift

Past memories → Memories

Various differences → Differences

End result → Result

Sudden crisis → Crisis

Each individual → Individual

Important essentials → Essentials

Often times/oftentimes → Often

In a confused state → Confused

Heavy/light in weight → Heavy/light

Period in time → Period

Round/flat in shape → Round/flat

Of an uncertain condition → Uncertain

In order to → To

Nowadays → Today

In my opinion, I think that → I think that / In my opinion

At this point in time → At this point / At this time

Due to the fact that → Because

3. Replacing Wordy Phrases with Precise Words

I went to see a person who gives expert advice. → I consulted an expert.

I really want to be a teacher. → I want to be a teacher.

4. Strengthening Verbs

Use precise, active verbs instead of vague, passive constructions:

- She has an abhorrence to loud noises. → She abhors loud noises.
- I had a cold for a week. → I suffered a cold for a week.
- Odysseus traveled a great distance to make it home. → Odysseus traveled a great distance toward home.

5. Avoiding Vague and Empty Words

Words such as area, aspect, element, factor, feature, field, kind, situation, thing, and type may signal wordiness.

- This was a poor idea. → This idea was poor.

- Something is wrong with the car. → The car vibrates when I accelerate.

Words such as nice, good, bad, interesting, and unique are too broad.

- Last night's movie was interesting. → The movie's unexpected plot twists were captivating.

For clarity of descriptive sentences, the following words and phrases should be eliminated from use:

- kind of
- a lot
- generally
- really

6. Eliminating Expletives (Unnecessary “It” and “There” Constructions)

There are three students in the classroom. → Three students are in the classroom.

It is crazy that school was cancelled. → That school was cancelled is crazy.

7. Avoid Broad and General Verbiage

I see what you mean. → I understand your point.

When it comes to doing things the right way, she takes the cake. → Janelle consistently uses poor judgment.

8. Maintain Formality in Academic Writing

Avoid colloquial expressions, clichés, slang, and informal language:

He needs to step up and be a man. → He needs to mature and act responsibly.

Read each sentence below and rewrite it as your own concise sentence below.

1. **Example:** I really want to be a doctor.
2. **Example:** In chemistry labs, students are expected to follow precise experimental procedures so that their results are accurate and reliable.
3. **Example:** I just wish that I had a piece of chocolate.
4. **Example:** Frequently, a chapter in a book reveals to the reader the main point that the author desires to bring out during the course of the chapter.
5. **Example:** The scene was extremely typical.
6. **Example:** Computer science courses often involve learning different programming languages, which students must master in order to create functional software applications.
7. **Example:** I took my cat to the vet who was an animal doctor.

References

George Mason University Writing Center. (2024). *Writing Concisely*. George Mason University.

<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/writing-resources/general-writing-practices/writing-concisely>

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