
Techniques for Reducing Wordiness

- Try not to use **I** and **we** in a formal paper. The paper is obviously yours, so you don't need to use phrases such as **I think**, **I believe**, or **It seems to me**.
- Avoid overusing **it is**, **there is**, and **there are** (weak expletives) at the beginning of sentences.

Wordy: **It is** expensive to rent old movies.
Concise: Renting old movies **is** expensive.

- Change **is** or **was**, when they occur alone, to an action verb.

Wordy: A new fire curtain **is** necessary for the stage.
Concise: The stage **needs** a new fire curtain.

- Change **is** or **have** with an **-ing** to a simple present or past tense verb as often as you can.

Wordy: The director **was having** problems.
Concise: The director **had** problems.

- Replace **passive** verbs with **active** verbs.

Wordy: The old movies **were ruined** in the fire.
Concise: The fire **ruined** the old movies.

- Change **which is** or **was**, when possible, to a past verb or **-ing** form.

Wordy: The movie, **which averages** 45 to 50 minutes, is black and white.
Concise: The movie, **averaging** 45 to 50 minutes, is black and white.

- Omit **this** from the beginning of a sentence by joining it to the preceding sentence by using a comma. (You may need to change the wording slightly.)

Wordy: The director fired the cast. **This resulted** in the hiring of a new cast.
Concise: The director fired the cast, **resulting** in the hiring of a new cast.

- Remove **should**, **would**, or **could** when possible and use a definite verb.

Wordy: They **could see** the problem.
Concise: They **saw** the problem.

- Change **–sion** and **–tion** words to verbs whenever possible.

Wordy: I **submitted an application** for the job.
 Concise: I **applied** for the job.

- Whenever possible, use a colon after a statement and eliminate the beginning words of the sentence.

Wordy: The theater has three main technical areas. **These areas are** costumes, scenery, and lighting.
 Concise: The theater has three main technical areas: costumes, scenery, and lighting.

- Combine two closely related short sentences by omitting part of one.

Wordy: Ms. Petty **is the director of this play**. She decided not to play the scene that way.
 Concise: Ms. Petty, **the director**, decided not to play the scene that way.

- Change a phrase or clause to an adjective.

Wordy: The director is concerned about problems **that may occur with the lighting, sound, and props**.
 Concise: The director is concerned about **the technical problems**.

- Never say the same thing twice. Do not repeat yourself. Stop saying the same thing over and over and over and over and . . .

Exercises for Reducing Wordiness

1. I truly believe that joining a car pool has advantages in this world of ours today. Two of these advantages are that a car pool saves on gas and that a car pool cuts down on polluting emissions in the air.
2. The movie was outstanding for several reasons. One reason why it was outstanding is because everything like the music and the plot had a meaning and a place.
3. It seems that juvenile delinquency among children and teenagers is expanding and growing at an ever-increasing rate in this modern day and age of the twenty-first century.
4. The guerillas kidnapped the hostage at gun point by holding a gun to his head. The next thing they did was to put a blindfold around his eyes. Then they put handcuffs on his wrists and forced him into a car.
5. Women who have jobs and also keep house have many problems. These women have little time for recreation. Often these women don't get enough sleep.
6. We couldn't decide if we should go skiing in our nearby park or drive to the ski resort in Wisconsin and ski.
7. I got up at seven. Then I bathed and I ate a quick breakfast. It was about 8:30 when I left for work.
8. The letter to the editor was written by someone who did not sign his name.