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.