

Lessons in Concision

What this handout is about

This handout will help you eliminate wordiness and write clear, concise sentences.

Methods of eliminating wordiness

When revising your paper for concision there are five basic principles to follow.

1. Delete words that mean little or nothing.
Generally speaking, people are now **likely to** switch jobs more often **than in the past**.
→ People switch jobs more often now.
We know that after **completing her studies** Plath moved to England.
→ After her studies Plath moved to England.
This is **kind of** amazing.
→ This is amazing.
2. Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words.
You need to go to **that building over there**.
→ You need to go to that building.
Don't tell anyone your PIN **number**.
→ Don't tell anyone your PIN.
3. Delete words implied by other words.
I hate the **cold winter weather** in New York.
→ I hate New York winters.
4. Replace a phrase with a word.
due to the fact that → because
in spite of the fact that → although
changes **in the environment** → environmental changes
5. Change negatives to affirmatives.
We do not know the implications of recent climate changes. →
We ignore the implications of recent climate changes.

Exercises

1. In the sentences below circle the words that are redundant. Make a list in the space provided below.

1. Critics cannot avoid employing complex and abstract technical terms if they are to successfully analyze literary texts and discuss them in a meaningful way.
2. Scientific research generally depends on fully accurate data if it is to offer theories that will allow us to predict the future in a plausible way.
3. In regard to desirable employment in teaching jobs, prospects for those engaged in graduate-school-level studies are at best not certain.
4. Notwithstanding the fact that all legal restrictions on the use of firearms are the subject of heated debate and argument, it is necessary that the general public not stop carrying on discussions pro and con in regard to them.
5. Most likely, a majority of all patients who appear at a public medical clinical facility do not expect special medical attention or treatment, because their particular health problems and concerns are often not major and for the most part can usually be adequately treated without much time, effort, and attention.



2. Circle the words that should be changed from negatives to affirmatives. Make a list.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Except when expenses do not exceed \$250, the Insured may not refuse to provide the Insurer with receipts, checks, or other evidence of costs.2. There is no possibility in regard to a reduction in the size of the federal deficit if reductions in federal spending are not introduced.3. Do not discontinue medication unless symptoms of dizziness and nausea are not present for six hours.4. No one should be prevented from participating in cost sharing educational programs without a full hearing into the reasons for his or her not being accepted. |
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Word List

Now, it's your turn! Review your own paper for words or phrases that need to be changed. Write your list below.

Sources

Williams, Joseph M. Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace. New York: Longman 2005.
Hacker, Diana. A Writer's Reference. Boston : Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.
McCrimmon, James N. Writing with a Purpose; a first course in college composition. Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1967.