



Clarity and Concision¹

Clarity and concision are important in scientific writing. Because the ideas and concepts in scientific writing are so complex, they need to be presented to readers in a way that's understandable and precise. This handout offers suggestions and strategies for reducing wordiness and improving clarity.

Eliminate:

Writing zeroes

Writing zeroes are words that do not add meaning or clarity to writing. Usually, writing zeroes can be eliminated without changing the surrounding sentence.

- For example: "In the course of our study, we discovered..." becomes "~~In the course of our study,~~ We discovered..."

Below are some common writing zeroes that can be eliminated from your writing:

The presence of	As a matter of fact
It should be pointed out that	I/we might add that
It is noteworthy that	In the course of
It is significant that	The fact that
It is interesting to note that	

Expletives – it+is/was or there+is/are/was/were

Notice that several of the writing zeroes above start with "it is." Keep an eye out for this and for sentence construction that begins, "there is." Often, these constructions indicate a writing zero.

Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases are those that begin with prepositions like in, with, for, over, through, at, by. Often these phrases provide extraneous information and can be eliminated.

Adjectives and adverbs

Like prepositional phrases and writing zeroes, adjectives and adverbs often complicate sentences without adding meaning or clarity. Below are some common adjectives and adverbs that can usually be removed.



Adjectives: Comprehensive, detailed, fundamental, specific, particular, somewhat, kind of, sort of, type of...

Adverbs: Very, really, basically, definitely, actually, practically, generally...

Trim Bulky and Redundant Phrases:

Redundancies/Tautologies

Below are words commonly used together. The words in parenthesis are redundant. You can simplify your sentences by removing the tautology.

(already) existing	introduced (a new)	(empty) space start
(alternative) choices	mix (together)	(out)
at (the) present (time)	never (before)	had done (previously)
(basic) fundamentals	none (at all)	(still) persists
(completely) eliminate	now (at this time)	(end) result
(continue to) remain	period (of time)	(final) outcome
(currently) being	(private) industry	(currently) underway
(separate) entities	(various) differences	each (individual)

Circumlocutions

Avoid indirect and roundabout writing. Direct writing is more concise and allows your ideas to be more clear for readers.

<u>Bulky</u>	<u>Trim</u>
At this point in time	now
At that point in time	then
Has the ability to	can
Has the potential to	can
In light of the fact that	because
In the event that	if
Owing/due to the fact that	because
The question as to whether	whether
There is no doubt but that	no doubt

More circumlocutions

the reason for for the reason that considering the fact that on the grounds that this is why	=because, since, why
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on the occasion of in a situation in which under circumstances in which	=when
as regards in reference to with regard to concerning the matter of where _____ is concerned	=about
it is crucial that it is necessary that there is a need/necessity for it is important that cannot be avoided	=must, should
is able to has the opportunity to has the capacity for	=can
it is possible that there is a chance that it could happen that the possibility exists for	=may, might, could

Simplify sentences and get to the point:

Verb phrases

Often writers use complex verb tenses that result in 2 or more verbs when a simple verb tense will do.

Bulky

are aware of/have knowledge of
are taking
are indications/indicative of
are suggestive of
can be compared to

Trim

know
take
indicate
suggest
resemble

Needlessly complex words

Category	Example	Possible Substitute
Nouns	Familiarization Utilization	Familiarity Use
Verbs	Facilitate Finalize Utilize	Cause Finish/end Use
Adjectives	Individualized	Individual



Adverbs/Prepositions	Firstly, secondly, thirdly Heretofore Hitherto Therewith Amongst	First, second, third Previous Until now With Among
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Nominalizations

Nominalization occurs when words that are not nouns become used as nouns, often at the beginning of a subject or noun phrase. Often, this results in overly complex and convoluted sentences that would be more clear with a distinct action.

- For example: “The discovery of the researchers was that the frontal lobe showed increased activation.” *Discovery* is a nominalization of the verb *discover*. A more direct, active construction, without the nominalization reads, “Researchers discovered increased activation in the frontal lobe.”

Common nominalizations include

Establishment, measurement, development, collection, discovery, movement, reaction, completion, failure, refusal, discussion, investigation...

Spend time editing:

Editing tips for clarity and concision

1: Dedicate one read-through solely to cutting. No additions allowed.

2: Use the Find/Search feature in Word/Adobe to hunt wordiness down

3: Search and/or circle:

- redundancies and zeroes you know you’re prone to
- any instance of expletives (*it + be verbs* or *there + be verbs*)
- any preposition beginning a phrase
- adverbs, especially “very” and “really”

References

1. The Writing Center at CU Denver. Clarity and concision. 2015.