

# **Clarity & Concision**

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.

# Always 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"

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

### 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.

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

#### **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 clearer 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...



# **Needlessly complex words**

<u>Category</u> <u>Example</u> <u>Possible Substitute</u>

Nouns Familiarization Familiarity

Utilization Use

Verbs Facilitate Cause

Finalize Finish/end

Utilize Use

Adjectives Individualized Individual

Adverbs/Prepositions Firstly, secondly, thirdly First, second, third

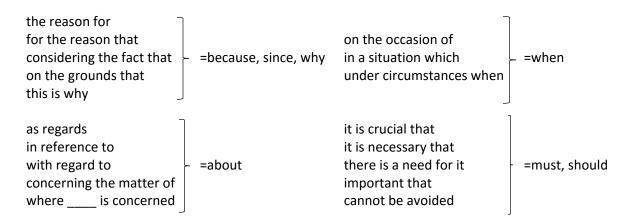
Heretofore Previous
Hitherto Until now
Therewith With
Amongst Among

#### Circumlocutions

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

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

# More circumlocutions





is able to has the opportunity to has the capacity for	=can	it is possible that there is a chance 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	<u>Trim</u>
are aware of/have knowledge of are taking	know take
are indications/indicative of	indicate
are suggestive of	suggest
can be compared to	resemble