

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	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)

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 should be pointed out that

It is noteworthy that

It is interesting to note that

I/we might add that

As a matter of fact

The fact that

In the course of

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 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

Circumlocutions

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

Bulky

At this point in time
 At that point in time
 Has the ability to/ Has the potential to
 In light of the fact that/ Owing/ due to the fact that
 In the event that
 The question as to whether
 There is no doubt but that

Trim

now
 then
 can
 because
 if
 whether
 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	on the occasion of in a situation which under circumstances when	} =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 for it 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
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