

The Portable Editor

Tips for Improving Your Writing

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Cut the Fat

Before submitting that last draft, be sure to edit your work for bloated phrases and stuffy sentences. After all, unnecessary words or fillers can easily tire readers, not to mention bury the main points you are trying to communicate. In this issue, we discuss how to eliminate wordiness and simplify your prose. This page includes information and tips from the UNC Writing Center at <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wweb/handouts/revision.html>, the Purdue University Online Writing Lab at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_concise.html and the Hamilton College Writing Center at <http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/sentence.html>.

Often, writers write like they speak - with a mouthful. Do your best to write tight, eliminating uninformative words or phrases. For example, the sentences below include “wordy” and concise versions that communicate the same meaning.

*Any particular type of dessert is fine with me. **Any dessert is fine with me.***
*Balancing the budget by Friday is an impossibility without some kind of extra help. **Balancing the budget by Friday is impossible without extra help.***

Want to clean up your writing? Then get rid of the following to make your sentences clearer:

kind of	really	definitely
sort of	basically	actually
type of	for all intents and purposes	generally
specific	particular	individual

Circumlocutions are commonly used roundabout expressions that take several words to communicate what could be said more succinctly. For example:

<i>Bloated</i>	<i>Succinct</i>
At this point in time	Now
At that point in time	Then
Has the ability to	Can
In light of the fact that	Because
In the event that	If
In the vicinity of	Near
In reference to	About
It is possible that	May
As a result of the fact that	Because

The question of whether

Whether

Wordy: *It is possible* that nothing will come of these preparations.

Concise: Nothing *may* come of these preparations.

Wordy: She *has the ability* to influence the outcome.

Concise: She *can* influence the outcome.

Wordy: *It is necessary* that we take a stand on this pressing issue.

Concise: We *must* take a stand on this pressing issue.

How accessible your writing is largely depends on the language you use. You should look for words or phrases that may alienate your readers. For example:

Inaccessible

Has the functionability

Operationalize

Prioritize

Utilize

Individualized

Personalized

Heretofore

Prior to

Accessible

Can function

Defined as, measured by

Assess

Use

Individual

Personal

Previously

Before

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These hours are reserved for students, but other times may be available.