

AVOIDING WORDINESS

Our rough drafts are full of extra words, because that's the way most of us speak and think. When we're revising a draft for an academic, scientific, or technical audience, however, we are expected to cut out every extra word and phrase. Taking out extra words frees up space to include more ideas and more evidence. It also helps readers get straight to the point. When you're revising a rough draft, therefore, keep asking yourself *do I really need this?* How many words and phrases can you cut while still communicating your meaning?

1. Take out key words and ideas that are repeated unnecessarily.

WORDY The committee members decided to have an office party for the employees' children. The main reason for their **decision** to have a **party** for the **children** was that employees had been complaining that the company did not pay enough attention to family life.

BETTER The committee members decided to have an office party for employees' children, mainly because employees had been complaining that the company did not pay enough attention to family life.

2. Take out words that are already implied by other words in the same sentence.

WORDY The **round yellow** sun shone brightly among the clouds **in the sky**.
(Isn't the sun always round? Aren't clouds usually in the sky?)

BETTER The sun shone brightly among the clouds.

WORDY She wore a coat in a red **color**. *(Red is, by definition, a color.)*

BETTER She wore a red coat.

3. Replace wordy stock phrases with single words

WORDY	BETTER	WORDY	BETTER
at the present time	now	in the event that	if
at all times when	whenever	in connection with	about
be of the opinion that	think	in spite of the fact that	although
by means of	by	in the nature of	like
due to the fact that	because	in view of the fact that	because
during the time that	while	it is often the case that	often
for the purpose of	for, so	on a frequent basis	frequently
has the capability to	can	until such time as	until

4. Simplify your sentence structure.

WORDY The cliffs are made of basalt, **which is** an igneous rock.

BETTER The cliffs are made of basalt, an igneous rock.

WORDY The MERSA virus, **which is resistant to antibiotics**, poses a serious public health risk.

BETTER The antibiotic-resistant MERSA virus poses a serious public health risk.

5. Reword sentences beginning with “there are,” “it is,” and similar expressions which refer to nothing in particular.

WORDY **There are** many factors contributing to the obesity epidemic.

BETTER Many factors contribute to the obesity epidemic.

WORDY **It is** unknown whether the vaccine will be effective.

BETTER The vaccine’s effectiveness is unknown.

6. Limit or avoid phrases describing your attitudes and writing strategies.

WORDY It seems to me that teachers should allow students to skip class.

BETTER Teachers should allow students to skip class.

WORDY The purpose of this paper is to inform you of my opinion that all family pets should be spayed or neutered.

BETTER All family pets should be spayed or neutered.

WORDY The previous paragraphs of this paper have explained how Dickinson uses word choice and images to communicate her theme.

BETTER Dickinson uses word choice and images to communicate her theme.