

## How to Eliminate Wordiness

### Why wordiness weakens your writing

When writing academic or professional texts, explaining your point in more words may muddle the message. Wordy sentences make the point ambiguous, and they may distort the message. In addition, most readers prefer short and crisp texts to lengthy and confusing ones. Academic and professional writers want to achieve clarity by putting their message in fewer but precise words.

The goal is to condense your text by 20%. Start by working with your delete key. In the next step, you may need to rewrite some of your sentences.

### Use a delete key: A checklist based on Joshua Schimel's *Writing Science*

#### ✓ Cut *unnecessary words* that duplicate information.

**Wordy:** "I will develop, *test, and apply* a new *synthetic* approach to produce photovoltaic plastics."

**Revised:** "I will develop a new approach to produce photovoltaic plastics." (Schimel, p. 161)

**Wordy:** "Most, *but not all* of the test subjects responded."

**Revised:** "Most of the test subjects responded." (Schimel, p. 161)

#### ✓ Delete *the obvious*.

**Wordy:** "*There is evidence that* X-17 production can be associated with enzyme induction (Chu et.al. 2008)."

**Revised:** "X-17 production can be associated with enzyme induction (Chu et.al. 2008)." (Schimel, p. 162)

#### ✓ Delete *unnecessary adjectives and adverbs*. Write with strong and clear nouns and verbs.

**Wordy:** "The *entire* reaction sequence takes less than one hour *to complete*."

**Revised:** "The reaction sequence takes less than one hour." (Schimel, p. 163)

Not all modifiers are superfluous or redundant. Here is an example of a good modifier: "final result" vs. "preliminary result" (Schimel, p. 166). Most online editing apps will mark modifiers in your text. In the next step, you should select and delete the unnecessary ones.

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✓ Check your metadiscourse for *redundancies*.

Metadiscourse is writing about your thinking and research. We use phrases such as “we found,” “we argue”, or “we hypothesize to announce rhetorical moves or strategies we use to get the point across. Make sure that your metadiscourse is not obvious or redundant.

**Wordy:** “*In this study*, we measured Y ....”

**Revised:** “We measured Y....” (Schimel, p. 167)

### Change sentence structure

Possible changes may include but are not limited to the following strategies:

✓ Reduce clauses to participial, gerund, or infinitive phrases.

**Wordy:** We decided *that we will measure X*.

**Revised:** We decided *to measure X*. Or: We measured X.

✓ Reduce clauses and phrases to single words.

**Wordy:** Users prefer electronic books *because these books are portable*.

**Revised:** Users prefer *portable* electronic books.

✓ Eliminate structural defects such as, for example, dangling modifiers or delayed predicates (please see a separate handout).

Here is an example of how a combination of revision strategies helps eliminate wordiness.

**Wordy:** Christian, who is an ambitious young scientist, found that the internship that he did at the company in the summer gave him the experience he needed.

**Revised:** Christian, an ambitious young scientist, found that the summer internship at the company gave him the needed experience.

### References

Schimel, J. (2012). *Writing science. How to write papers that get cited and proposals that get funded*. Oxford University Press.

### Further reading:

Zeiger, M. (2007). *Essentials of writing biomedical research papers*. McGraw-Hill, Health Professions Division.

*Eliminating words* (n.d.). Purdue Online Writing Lab.

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/academic\\_writing/conciseness/eliminating\\_words.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/conciseness/eliminating_words.html)

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