

Wordiness

This resource is designed for English Language Learners (ELLs) who require assistance in a particular academic skill. Each handout provides brief explanations related to different core skills (reading, writing, listening, and/or speaking), and it offers some simple examples of mistakes and how these might be corrected.

While these handouts are designed primarily for ELL students, anyone seeking to improve their writing may find these documents useful. Check out the links at the end of the handout for more resources.

What is wordiness?

Good academic writing is clear and direct.

You can write clearly and concisely by:

- expressing your ideas in the simplest way
- using the fewest words as necessary

It is completely normal if your first draft is wordy. Take the time to revise your work and eliminate the wordiness.

Seven strategies to reduce wordiness

1. Eliminate redundancy

Are you repeating the same ideas? Are you using a larger phrase that could be shortened? Here are ten examples of redundant phrases and how they can be fixed.

Redundant	Revised
Free gift	Gift
During the course of	During
Due to the fact that	Because
With the exception of	Except
First priority	Priority
Still remain	Remain
Red in colour	Red
In order to	To
In spite of the fact that	Although
Big in size	Big

2. Omit “There is/are...” and “It is...” phrases

You do not need those words. See how these three examples eliminate those words but keep the original meanings of the sentences.

Examples

- ✗ There is a teacher who works as a volunteer for her community.
- ✓ A teacher works as a volunteer for her community.

- ✗ There are many people who play sports.
- ✓ Many people play sports.

- ✗ It is the rent that is unaffordable in the city.
- ✓ The rent is unaffordable in the city.

In the above examples, the phrase “There is/are...” or “It is...” is unnecessary. The revised versions are more concise.

3. Avoid nominalization

Definition

Nominalization refers to using verbs in their noun forms. Nominalization results in wordiness.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/english_as_a_second_language/esl_students/nominalizations_and_subject_position.html

Example

- ✗ The improvement in students’ reading skills was made.
- ✓ Students’ reading skills were improved.

Above, you can reduce the nominalization “The improvement in” (three words) to one word “improved.”

4. Use the active voice

Definition

In the **active voice**, the subject of the sentence takes action, while in the **passive voice** the subject of the sentence receives the action.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/active_and_passive_voice/active_versus_passive_voice.html

Write in the active voice. The active voice uses fewer words than the passive voice and is easier to understand.

Before you use the active voice, check your assignment guidelines and the goal of your sentence. If your subject “acts,” use the active voice; if the subject is “acted upon,” use the passive voice.

Examples

Passive: The issue was investigated by the team.

Active: The team investigated the issue. The first sentence with the passive voice leads to wordiness. The active voice in the second sentence is clear and concise.

Passive: It was proved that the result was reliable.

Active: The result proved reliable. The word count has decreased from 8 in the first sentence to 4 in the second sentence.

5. Replace prepositional verbs with verbs that do not need prepositions

Wordy	Revised
Ask for	Request
Find out	Determine
Long for	Anticipate

6. Avoid overusing qualifiers

Definition

The **qualifier** is a word or a phrase that is added to another word to modify its meaning, either by limiting it (*She was **somewhat** angry*) or by enhancing it (*The baby is **very** cute*). Qualifiers include words such as *really*, *extremely*, *very*, and *absolutely*.

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/qualifiers/>

Qualifiers are empty words that weaken your writing. Remove them from your writing.

- ✗ His friend was extremely furious.
- ✓ His friend was furious.

Trim the unnecessary qualifier “extremely” in this example to achieve conciseness.

7. Delete prepositional phrases

- ✗ the findings of those scientists
- ✓ those scientists’ findings

The revised version does not include any preposition and is more concise.

- ✗ the advantages of the daughter of the owner of the house
- ✓ the advantages of the house owner’s daughter

This revised phrase only contains one preposition “of” and reads more fluently.

Practice Exercises

1. Delete redundancy:

The store offers complimentary gift wrapping at no charge to its customers.

2. Delete redundancy:

Due to the fact that the teaching assistant was sick, the tutorial was cancelled.

3. Omit the phrase “There is/are...”:

There are twenty students who have submitted their assignments.

4. Omit the phrase “It is...”:

It is Jack who cleans the room every week.

5. Avoid nominalization:

The researcher will perform an evaluation of the design.

6. Use active voice:

The growth of economy is influenced by technological development.

7. Replace the prepositional verb with a single word:

Jerry longed for a vacation.

8. Remove the unnecessary qualifier:

The issue has become very controversial.

9. Delete the prepositional phrase:

The reason for the failure of his final exam was that he had a high fever on the exam day.

10. Delete the prepositional phrase:

The blood pressure of the mouse was elevated.

Answers

1. The store offers complimentary gift wrapping to its customers.
2. Because the teaching assistant was sick, the tutorial was cancelled.
3. Twenty students have submitted their assignments.
4. Jack cleans the room every week.
5. The researcher will evaluate the design.
6. Technological development influences the growth of economy.
7. Jerry anticipated a vacation.
8. The issue has become controversial.
9. He failed the exam because he had a high fever on the exam day.
10. The mouse's blood pressure was elevated.

More resources for wordiness

Common grammatical errors: Wordiness – York University

<http://bethune.yorku.ca/writing/wordiness/>

Seven rules for avoiding wordiness – Writing Centre, University of New Brunswick

<https://www.unb.ca/fredericton/studentservices/resources/pdfs/wss/wordiness.pdf>

Wordiness: Danger signals and how to react – UofT Writing Advice

<http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/revising/wordiness/>

Develop your academic language, improve your academic skills, and get a Co-Curricular Record notation. Attend the Professional English Language Skills (PELS) workshops:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/professional-english-language-skills-pels>

Get feedback on your writing and discuss your thought process. Book an appointment with an instructor: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/appointments-undergraduate>.

Looking for more learning strategies? Visit us at: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/>.