

Revising for Conciseness

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The ability to *simplify* means to *eliminate the unnecessary* so that the *necessary may speak*.

— Hans Hoffman

Substitute *damn* every time you're inclined to write *very*; your editor will *delete* it and the writing will be just as it should be.

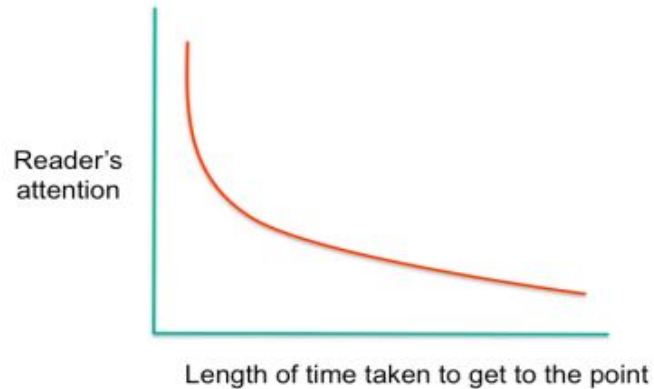
— Mark Twain

Why?

Word limits matter!

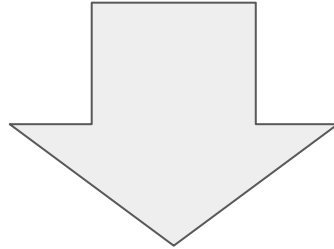
Concise Writing: Lower Your Word Count

Concise: Giving a lot of information clearing, in a few words.



Example:

In my personal opinion, it is necessary that we should not ignore the opportunity to think over each and every solution offered. (Wordy)



We should consider each solution. (More concise)

Editing for Conciseness is like Pruning and Shaking a Tree

1. Prune the big limbs - Save the vital and interesting parts
2. Shake out the dead leaves - Find and delete language that is redundant, obvious, unnecessary (modifiers), and verbose.

How to be concise 1: Simplify structure

Strengthen the verb

The supervisor did not make an **estimate** of costs.

Avoid unnecessary is, are, was and were

The project leader is responsible for monitoring and balancing the budget. (Wordy)

The project leader monitors and balances the budget. (More concise)

Avoid get: typically paired with another word

get bigger = grow

get away from = escape

get better = improve

get worse = worsen/deteriorate

get closer = approach

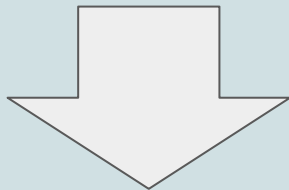
get less important = diminish

How to be concise 2: Avoid redundancy

Pairs	full and complete	true and accurate	each and every
Modifiers	<i>each</i> individual	<i>the reason</i> why...	<i>future</i> plans...
Categories	a red <i>color</i>	cheapest <i>price</i>	uncertain <i>condition</i>
Phrases	<i>because of the fact</i> = because	<i>a lot of</i> = many	<i>A variety of</i> = several

How to be concise 3: Avoid expletive construction

There was a bear that ate the trash in the neighbor's yard. (Wordy)



A bear ate the trash in the neighbor's yard.
(More concise)

How to be concise 4: Avoid meaningless words

1) Delete worthless adjectives

His **meaningful** contribution (all are meaningful)

An **interesting** point is... (let the reader decide)

In the **foreseeable** future... (if foreseeable, why not say)

The sample was an **important** factor... (no adjective is needed)

2) Delete worthless adverbs

really, actually, virtually, basically, generally, definitely, personally, practically, essentially...

How to be concise 5: Use only necessary signposting

Writing about writing: More help to the writer than reader

In the next *subsection* comes the *causes*, which *discusses* the...

Avoid unnecessary **future** tense:

This essay *will*...

Use **signposts sparingly**, let logic flow... *with a question?*

This *chapter discusses* the factors that cause terrorism.

What causes terrorism?

How to be concise 6: Avoid negative language

Don't write in the negative. Write in the affirmative.

Make negatives affirmatives:

not many = **few**

not the same = **different**

not different = **alike**

does not have = **lacks**

did not consider = **ignored**

did not allow = **prevented**

Activities for concision: Text reduction

The following paragraph contains 158 words. By omitting redundant information , expletive constructions, meaningless announcements, and unnecessary words and phrases, you should be able revise the paragraph so that it contains no more than 88 words. You may change a few words if you like, but don't change the meaning of any statements. Keep working until you trim the paragraph to 88 words.

In my own personal opinion, I believe that all elevators should be required to undergo thorough and complete inspections once they have reached the old age of twenty-five years old. From what I have seen and read, most elevator accidents that tend to occur on older elevator models can be traced to poor, inadequate, bad maintenance...

Activities for concision: Haikus

- 1) identify the format of haiku poetry.
- 2) create haikus using concise and descriptive language to evoke images.
- 3) summarize a longer piece of writing in the format of a haiku.

Haiku Step 1: Identify the format of haiku poetry

Begin by projecting a haiku you have selected on the whiteboard. Read the haiku together. Ask students questions about the traditional format of a haiku. Cover the following areas:

- Number of syllables per line (5-7-5 pattern)
- Number of lines (three lines)
- No rhyme
- The necessity of descriptive and concise vocabulary in a haiku

Haiku Step 2: Create haikus using concise and descriptive language to evoke images

Put students in pairs and give them a selection of Haikus. Ask students to read with their partners several haikus and find one they would like to share with the class. Explain that they are to tell the class if it follows the traditional format and examples of concise, descriptive vocabulary.

Once students have had enough time to prepare, have each pair share their haiku example with the class. Be sure to cover the following:

- Number of syllables may vary slightly
- Examples of descriptive, concise words

Haiku Step 3: Summarize a longer piece of writing in the format of a haiku.

Explain to the class that they will write haikus that summarize a writing assignment they recently completed. Project a sample Haiku and tell the class this haiku summarizes an essay about the importance of a healthy diet for college students. Ask students to explain based on this haiku what reasons the writer used in his essay.

Reporter Deadline

Students are shown a video of a crime or an accident from a TV drama series. A list of information that must be reported is provided about the incident. Students need to report on the incident by providing clear, concise information. Every word counts and eventually students can read out their stories to the class. Winner for the best story!