

WORDINESS: DANGER SIGNALS *and Ways to React*

One of the most efficient ways to improve your writing is to edit it for conciseness. You may have been struggling to think ideas through as you wrote—and piled up alternative wordings. Or you may have fallen into the habit of using more words than necessary just to use up space. If you can let your original draft "cool down" a while, you will find it easier to recognize unnecessary words and edit them out. Your reader will thank you! Here are some common patterns of wordiness, with sensible things to do about them.

Doubling of Words (INSTEAD, *choose one*):

| | | |
|-------|---|--|
| e.g., | mutual agreement (<i>agreement</i>) | future prospects (<i>prospects</i>) |
| | consensus of opinion (<i>consensus</i>) | reconsider again (<i>reconsider</i>) |
| | whether or not (<i>whether</i>) | inadvertent error (<i>error</i>) |

Intensifiers, Qualifiers (INSTEAD, *omit or give specific details*):

| | | |
|-------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| e.g., | very | really |
| | extremely | definitely |
| | a considerable amount of | to a certain extent |

Formulaic Phrases (INSTEAD, *use a one-word form or omit*):

| | | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|---|
| e.g., | for the purpose of (<i>to</i>) | due to the fact that (<i>because</i>) |
| | at this point in time (<i>now</i>) | in the near future (<i>soon</i>) |
| | with regard to (<i>about</i>) | in view of the fact that (<i>because</i>) |
| | as the case may be (<i>---</i>) | Basically, . . . (<i>---</i>) |

Catch-all Terms (INSTEAD, *omit wherever possible*):

| | | | |
|-------|---------|---------|-----------|
| e.g., | aspect | field | quality |
| | case | kind | situation |
| | fact | matter | sort |
| | factor | nature | thing |
| | feature | problem | type |

WEAK A surprising **aspect** of most labour negotiations is their friendly **quality**.

IMPROVED Most labour negotiations are surprisingly friendly.

WEAK The **fact** of the war had the **effect** of causing many changes.

IMPROVED The war caused many changes. Specifically . . .

Padded Verbs (INSTEAD, *use a one-word form*):

e.g. to have an expectation, hope, wish, understanding, etc.
 (*to expect, hope, wish understand, etc.*)
 to make an arrangement, plan, decision, inquiry, acquisition, etc.
 (*to arrange, plan, decide, inquire, acquire, etc.*)

Unnecessary "to be" and "being" (INSTEAD, *omit*):

WEAK The program is considered **to be** effective.

IMPROVED The book is considered effective *OR* The program is effective.

WEAK because of the terrain **being** rough

IMPROVED because of the rough terrain

Passive Verbs (INSTEAD, *use active voice, preferably with a personal subject*):

WEAK It **is felt** that an exercise program **should be attempted** by this patient before any surgery **is performed**.

IMPROVED The patient should attempt an exercise program before surgery.

IMPROVED I recommend that the patient attempt an exercise program before surgery.

IMPROVED Mr. Lee, please do these exercises every day for six weeks to strengthen your leg muscles before we try any more surgery.

WEAK The bevelling jig **is said** by most users **to be** faulty.

IMPROVED Most users say the bevelling jig is faulty.

Overuse of Relative Structures ("Who," "Which," "That") (INSTEAD, *omit*):

WEAK The novel, **which is** entitled *Ulysses*, takes place . . .

IMPROVED The novel *Ulysses* takes place . . .

WEAK **It was** Confucius **who** said . . .

IMPROVED Confucius said . . .

WEAK **I think that** X is the case. . .

IMPROVED X is the case, as this evidence shows: . . .

WEAK **There is a tendency** among many writers **who may be seen** to display **certain signs of lack of** confidence that their sentences **will be overloaded** with relative clauses and other words **which are** generally useless **in function**.

IMPROVED Many hesitant writers overload their sentences with relative clauses and other useless words.