

## ELIMINATING WORDINESS

- 1. Do not repeat a word** unless you need it again for clarity or emphasis.  
WORDY: When I was a child, my favorite relatives were the relatives who treated me like a grown-up.  
REVISED: When I was a child, my favorite relatives treated me like a grown-up.
- 2. Avoid redundancy.** Don't say the same thing twice using different words or phrases.  
WORDY: The hero begins to behave strangely and in odd ways following his tryst with a witch he meets secretly at midnight.  
REVISED: The hero begins to behave strangely following his midnight tryst with a witch.
- 3. In general, don't start sentences with There is, There are, or There were.**  
WORDY: There are many ways in which we can classify houses.  
REVISED: We can classify houses in many ways.
- 4. Avoid cluttering sentences with nouns.**  
WORDY: The reason for George's refusal to be a member of the secret society was his dislike of its elitism.  
REVISED: George refused to join the secret society because he disliked its elitism.
- 5. Remove adjective clauses like who are, which was, and that were.**  
WORDY: The antique dealer who is on Allen Street has a pair of silver candlesticks that were designed by Paul Revere.  
REVISED: The antique dealer who is on Allen Street has a pair of silver candlesticks designed by Paul Revere.
- 6. Replace prepositional phrases** with single adjectives or adverbs.  
WORDY: She regarded me in a stern way.  
REVISED: She regarded me sternly.
- 7. Remove to be** whenever possible.  
WORDY: Vince Lombardi was considered to be an excellent football coach.  
REVISED: Vince Lombardi was considered an excellent football coach.

**PHRASE****REPLACEMENT**

as a result of  
being that  
due to the fact that  
for the reason that  
on account of  
on the grounds that

because, since

has the capability of  
is able to  
possesses the ability to

can

at the present moment  
at this juncture  
at this point in time  
within the current time frame

now

a considerable proportion of  
a large number of  
the greater number of  
the substantial majority of

many, most

a case in point is  
an example of this would be  
in regard to  
in the case of  
with attention to

for example

it is evident that  
it should be obvious that

clearly, obviously

concerning the matter of

about

circumstances dictate that  
it is imperative that  
it is incumbent upon  
it is of great importance that  
there is a need for

should, must

at a time which  
during an occasion when  
in a situation in which  
on the occasion of

when

in a situation in which  
on the occasion of

despite the conditions that  
even taking into consideration  
the fact that  
even though  
regardless of the fact that  
at all time

Although

always

By means of

by

In the event of

if

Along the lines of

like, as

With the result that/ designed so that

so

In order to / with a view toward/

For the purpose of

to

For the reason that/ on the grounds that/

On the basis of

because

In connection with/ in relation to/ with respect to

With regard to/ in the manner of

about

Many writers in college choose language that is either overused (clichéd) or too stuffy or complicated. They may do this because they're unfamiliar with a specialized topic or think they must sound "smart" to their reader, a teacher with considerable knowledge. But most teachers are more irritated than impressed by such language.

## 1 Omit Clichés and Vague Generalizations

Much wordiness stems from a lack of the tough, careful attention to language characteristic of the best writing. **Clichés** and **vague generalizations** are like the sayings in fortune cookies, empty of meaning until the reader plugs in some concrete association. But it's a serious mistake to assume that your reader will do your work for you.

**CLICHÉD** In **today's modern world**, college graduates **stumble across a startling discovery** before they **strike out on their own**. The best jobs are not necessarily the ones that give you a **shot at big money** but the ones that **turn you on** personally.

**EDITED** Almost before they have received their diplomas, today's college graduates begin to rethink the idea of employment. The glamour of high-salary positions soon wears thin, replaced by hopes of happiness, job security, and friendly colleagues.

A passage with vague generalizations may be short but still wordy because it offers relatively little information. To revise, *add specific details* or *combine sentences* to eliminate repetition and highlight relationships.

**WORDY** Glaciers were of central importance in the shaping of the North American landscape. They were responsible for many familiar geological features. Among the many remnants of glacial activity are deeply carved valleys and immense piles of sand and rock.

**COMBINED** Glaciers carved deep valleys and left behind immense piles of sand and rock, shaping much of the North American landscape in the process.

**DETAILS ADDED** Glaciers carved deep valleys and left behind immense piles of sand and rock, shaping much of the North American landscape in the process. Cape Cod and Long Island are piles of gravel deposited by glaciers. The Mississippi River and the Great Lakes were left behind when the ice melted.

## 2 Edit Overblown Language

**Overblown language** consists of words too formal or technical for the writer's purpose and audience. Students often use formal language and technical terms in an attempt to impress their instructors and sound authoritative. Rein in your formal diction and technical words, using them only when you are sure of their meaning and when they contribute directly to your point.

**OVERBLOWN** Under the **present conditions of** our society, marriage **practices** generally **demonstrate a high degree of** homogeneity.

**APPROPRIATE** In our culture, people tend to marry others who are like themselves.

### 3 Eliminate Excessive Writer's Commentary

In certain contexts, talking directly to readers can be an acceptable strategy. If you use such **writer's commentary**, do so cautiously. You can use phrases like *as previously stated* or *I intend to demonstrate* to remind your readers of a point you made earlier or to set the stage for what's to come, but such phrases can become superfluous if you use them too often.

**IRRITATING** **As I have already shown**, considerable research suggests that placebos (pills with no physical effect) can sometimes lead to improvements or a cure. However, **my paper documents the tendency of** experts in medical ethics to question the ethics of placebo use, calling it a form of lying. **I intend to show** that the effects of placebos (**mentioned above**) overcome any moral concerns **such as the one I have just described**.

**EDITED** Considerable research has shown that placebos (pills with no physical effect) can sometimes lead to improvements or a cure. Experts in medical ethics, however, question the ethics of placebo use, calling it a form of lying. **This paper** will argue that the effects of placebos overcome any such moral concerns.

**TOO OVERT** **The thesis of my paper is that** American culture associates the pursuit of knowledge with social ineptitude and the denial of emotion. **I have chosen to focus on** Mr. Spock from the *Star Trek* series as an exemplar of this unfortunate public attitude toward education.

**EDITED** American culture associates the pursuit of knowledge with social ineptitude and the denial of emotion. This unfortunate public attitude toward education is well represented in the character of Spock, the brilliant but only half-human Vulcan in the *Star Trek* series.