

Wordiness

Wordiness most often occurs when a writer wants to sound more professional, academic, or complex; being wordy actually detracts from your argument, though, and hides your ideas among big words and inflated language. A sentence is too wordy if it can be tightened without loss of meaning.

Fix a wordy sentence by **removing** unnecessary phrases, **changing** verb tenses, and **choosing** better adjectives.

How to Eliminate Wordiness

Find sentences with forms of the verb “to be” (be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been). Try to change these verbs so you don’t have more than three or four per page.

Shakespeare ~~is indicating~~ that something is wrong in the state of Denmark.
Shakespeare **indicates** that something is wrong in the state of Denmark.

Change passive verbs into active verbs. The subject of the sentence should usually be *performing* the action of the verb (subjects and verbs underlined below).

A bigger boat was rented by the crew. (the *crew* is performing the action here)
The crew from my marina rented a bigger boat.

[See the handout “Active and Passive Voice” for more information.]

Replace prepositional phrases with adjectives or possessive nouns if they cannot be removed completely (prepositional phrases underlined below).

She sat on a chair in the kitchen of the lovely house.
She sat on a **kitchen** chair in the lovely house.

Theresa plans to supervise the training of her dog.
Theresa plans to supervise her dog’s training.

Combine two clauses into one, especially if you find many commas in one sentence that might confuse your reader.

Not only does Marshall cite the guide, but Margot, his assistant, faithfully does as well.
Both Marshall and his assistant Margot faithfully cite the guide.

Replace auxiliary verbs (verbs with two or more words) with an action or motion verb.

She ~~seems to be having~~ trouble with the required reading.
She **struggles** with the required reading.

Fordham University Writing Centers

Words and Phrases to Avoid, Remove, or Replace

Too Inflated:	More Concise:
along the lines of	like
as a matter of fact	in fact
at all times	always
at the present time	now, currently
at this point in time	now, currently
because of the fact that	because
by means of	by
due to the fact that	because
for the purpose of	for
for the reason that	because
have the ability to	be able to, can
in light of the fact that	because
in order to	to
in spite of the fact that	although, though
in the event that	if
in the final analysis	finally
in the nature of	like
in the neighborhood of	about
on the occasion of	when
until such time as	until

Revision Checklist

- Underline forms of the verb “to be” (be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been). Can you change the verb by removing “to be” and using a stronger form of the verb?
- Underline passive verbs. Can you change them into active verbs?
- Underline prepositional phrases. Would your meaning change significantly if you removed some of them? Can you use an adjective or a possessive noun instead?
- Look for sentences with two or more commas. Can you combine two clauses into one by changing the word order?
- Underline auxiliary verbs. Can you replace them with an action or motion verb?
- Underline occurrences of words from the “Too Inflated” list above. Can you make them “More Concise”?

Where in *The Bedford Handbook*?

Section 16: Wordy Sentences