AVOIDING WORDINESS

Our rough drafts are full of extra words, because that's the way most of us speak and think. When we're revising a draft for an academic, scientific, or technical audience, however, we are expected to cut out every extra word and phrase. Taking out extra words frees up space to include more ideas and more evidence. It also helps readers get straight to the point. When you're revising a rough draft, therefore, keep asking yourself do I really need this? How many words and phrases can you cut while still communicating your meaning?

Take out key words and ideas that are repeated unnecessarily.

**WORDY** The committee members decided to have an office party for the employees' children. The main reason for their decision to have a party for the children was that employees had been complaining that the company did not pay enough attention to family life.

**BETTER** The committee members decided to have an office party for employees’ children, mainly because employees had been complaining that the company did not pay enough attention to family life.

Take out words already implied by other words in the same sentence.

**WORDY** The round yellow sun shone brightly among the clouds in the sky.  
(Isn’t the sun always round? Aren’t clouds usually in the sky?)

**BETTER** The sun shone brightly among the clouds.

**WORDY** She wore a coat in a red color. (Red is, by definition, a color.)

**BETTER** She wore a red coat.

Replace wordy stock phrases with single words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORDY</th>
<th>BETTER</th>
<th>WORDY</th>
<th>BETTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at the present time</td>
<td>now</td>
<td>in the event that</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at all times when</td>
<td>whenever</td>
<td>in connection with</td>
<td>about</td>
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<tr>
<td>be of the opinion that</td>
<td>think</td>
<td>in spite of the fact that</td>
<td>although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by means of</td>
<td>by</td>
<td>in the nature of</td>
<td>like</td>
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<tr>
<td>due to the fact that</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>in view of the fact that</td>
<td>because</td>
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<tr>
<td>during the time that</td>
<td>while</td>
<td>it is often the case that</td>
<td>often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for the purpose of</td>
<td>for, so</td>
<td>on a frequent basis</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has the capability to</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>until such time as</td>
<td>until</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Simplify your sentence structure.

**WORDY** The cliffs are made of basalt, **which is** an igneous rock.

**BETTER** The cliffs are made of basalt, an igneous rock.

**WORDY** The MERSA virus, **which is resistant to antibiotics**, poses a serious public health risk.

**BETTER** The antibiotic-resistant MERSA virus poses a serious public health risk.

Reword sentences beginning with “there are,” “it is,” and similar expressions which refer to nothing in particular.

**WORDY** *There are* many factors contributing to the obesity epidemic.

**BETTER** Many factors contribute to the obesity epidemic.

**WORDY** *It is* unknown whether the vaccine will be effective.

**BETTER** The vaccine’s effectiveness is unknown.

Limit or avoid phrases describing your attitudes and writing strategies.

**WORDY** It seems to me that teachers should allow students to skip class.

**BETTER** Teachers should allow students to skip class.

**WORDY** The purpose of this paper is to inform you of my opinion that all family pets should be spayed or neutered.

**BETTER** All family pets should be spayed or neutered.

**WORDY** The previous paragraphs of this paper have explained how Dickinson uses word choice and images to communicate her theme.

**BETTER** Dickinson uses word choice and images to communicate her theme.