

# REVISING FOR CLARITY AND CONCISION

Some of the following concepts are adapted from *Style*, by Joseph M. Williams.

Ten principles of economy can help revising unnecessarily verbose writing:

## 1. DELETE MEANINGLESS WORDS

Don't use words whose meaning adds nothing to the sentence:

kind of	actually	particular/ly	certain	really	various
virtually	individual	basically	generally	given	practically

✗ Productivity **actually** depends on **certain** factors that **basically** involve psychology more than any **particular** technology.

✓ Productivity depends more on psychology than on technology.

## 2. DELETE REPETITIVE WORDS

When you use a familiar pair of adjectives, your readers probably need only one of them:

full and complete	hope and trust	any and all	true and accurate
each and every	basic and fundamental	hopes and desires	first and foremost

✗ **Each and every** person should demand the **full and complete** text of any **basic, fundamental** employee benefits package.

✓ Each person should demand the full text of any fundamental employee benefits package.

3. DELETE WORDS WHOSE MEANING YOUR READER CAN INFER FROM OTHER WORDS.

- Redundant Modifiers – the meaning of a word implies its modifier:

final outcome	past history	various different	basic fundamentals
completely finish	future plans	personal beliefs	true facts
consensus of opinion	terrible tragedy	free gift	each individual
continue on	return back to	penetrate into	circle around

✗ Do not try to *anticipate in advance* those events that will **completely revolutionize** society because **past history** shows that it is the **eventual outcome** of minor events that **unexpectedly surprises** us more.

✓ Do not try to anticipate revolutionary events because history shows the outcome of minor events surprises us more.

- Redundant Categories – every word implies its general category:

period of time	large in size	round in shape	honest in character
unusual in nature	of a bright color	in a confused state	at an early time

✗ The holes must be aligned in an *accurate manner*.

✓ The holes must be aligned accurately.

✗ The *educational process* and public *recreational activities* are the responsibility of the *county government*.

✓ The county is responsible for education and public recreation.

- General Implications – general version of the others, but harder to spot:

✗ Imagine someone **trying** to learn the rules for **playing a game** of chess.

✓ Imagine someone learning the rules of chess.

- Unnecessary Explanation – don't tell your readers what they already know:

- This type of revision depends upon audience knowledge. Don't explain terms and concepts already familiar to the audience.

4. REPLACE A PHRASE WITH A WORD – LOOK FOR A WORD THAT SAYS THE SAME THING AS A PHRASE OR CLAUSE.

because, since, why:	must, should:
the reason for due to the fact that owing to the fact that in light of the fact that considering the fact that on the grounds that this is why	it is crucial that it is necessary that there is a need/necessity for it is important that it is incumbent upon cannot be avoided
although, even though:	if:
despite the fact that regardless of the fact that notwithstanding the fact that	in the event that if it should transpire/happen that under circumstances in which
can	about
is able to is in a position to has the opportunity to has the capacity for has the ability to	as regards in reference to with regard to concerning the matter of where . . . is concerned
may, might, can, could	before, when, as, after:
it is possible that there is a chance that it could happen that the possibility exists for	prior to in anticipation of subsequent to following on at the same time as simultaneously with
when	less/fewer, better/worse, more:
on the occasion of in a situation in which under circumstances in which	increase in decrease in more

✗ I would now like to say some words **concerning the matter of a decrease in the number** of applicants to universities. Students **are in a position** these days to apply **prior to** hearing word about any financial aid they may receive. **Despite the fact that** there has been an **increase in** tuition costs **owing to the fact that** there has been an **increase in** overhead costs, **it is crucial that** we, as administrators, **are in a position to** assuage their fears **concerning the matter** of money.

✓ I would now like to say some words about fewer students applying to universities. Students these days can apply before hearing word about any financial aid they may receive. Although tuition costs are rising because of more overhead costs, we, as administrators, must assuage their fears about money.

5. CHANGE NEGATIVES TO AFFIRMATIVES – TO BE DIRECT, CHOOSE THE AFFIRMATIVE:

not different → similar	not many → few	not remember → forget
not notice → overlook	not include → omit	not consider → ignore
not the same → different	not often → rarely	not have → lack
not allow → prevent	not admit → deny	not accept → reject

Some verbs, conjunctions, and prepositions are implicitly negative:

preclude	prevent	lack	fail	doubt
reject	avoid	deny	refuse	exclude
contradict	prohibit	bar	except	unless
without	against	lacking	absent	but for

✗ When applicants have failed to submit applications without documentation, benefits will not be denied.

✓ You will receive benefits only if you submit documentation.

6. CHANGE RELATIVE PRONOUN CLAUSES (THOSE WITH “THAT,” “WHICH,” OR “WHO”) TO PHRASES:

✗ The lesson that will be taught today is on concision.

✓ Today’s lesson is on concision.

✗ The employee who sells the most wins a prize.

✓ The top-selling employee wins a prize.

7. USE ACTIVE VOICE WHENEVER POSSIBLE:

✗ The clearest reports will be honored.

✓ The company will honor the clearest reports.

✗ The quarterly earnings were presented by Bill Gates.

✓ Bill Gates presented the quarterly earnings.

8. AVOID EXPLETIVE CONSTRUCTIONS (E.G., “IT IS . . .” OR “THERE ARE . . .”) AT THE BEGINNING OF A SENTENCE:

✗ There are five people who will be absent today.

✓ Five people will be absent today.

✗ It is the copier that is functioning poorly.

✓ The copier is functioning poorly.

9. DON'T OVERUSE NOMINALIZATIONS (VERBS CHANGED INTO NOUNS):

✗ The cable company did not give an explanation of the charge.

✓ The cable company did not explain the charge.

✗ Lack of preparation lead to a failure.

✓ He failed because he didn't prepare.

10. AVOID STRINGS OF PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES:

✗ The cause of the success of the project was brought about by increases in the financing of the team.

✓ The project's success was caused by the team's increased finances.

✗ A revision of your paper will result in increases in clarity in your prose.

✓ Revising your paper increases your prose's clarity.