

3

The Hamilton College Writing Center presents

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF WRITING

The Third Deadly Sin: Wordiness

Concise writing is key to clear communication. Wordiness obscures your ideas and frustrates your reader. Make your points succinctly.

As Strunk and White tell us in *The Elements of Style* (4th ed.):

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences.... This requires not that the writer makes all sentences short, or avoid all detail and treat subjects only in outline, but that every word tell. (23)

STRATEGIES FOR ELIMINATING WORDINESS

Use action verbs rather than forms of the verb *to be* (e.g., *is, are, was, were*).

Wordy: The reason that General Lee invaded Pennsylvania in June 1863 was to draw the Army of the Potomac away from Richmond.

Revised (replace *was* with action verb *invaded*): General Lee invaded Pennsylvania in June 1863 to draw the Army of the Potomac away from Richmond.

Wordy: *Tom Jones* is a novel by Fielding that comically portrays English society in the eighteenth century.

Revised (replace *is* with action verb *portrays*): Fielding's novel *Tom Jones* comically portrays English society in the eighteenth century.

Make the real subject the actual subject of the sentence; make the real verb the actual verb.

Wordy: In Crew's argument there are many indications of her misunderstanding of natural selection.

Revised (replace *there* with *argument*; replace *are* with *demonstrates*): Crew's argument repeatedly demonstrates misunderstanding of natural selection.

COMMON SOURCES OF WORDINESS

Redundancies: *My personal opinion, at the present time, the basic essentials, connect together*

Unnecessary Phrases/Clauses: *The reason why is that, this is a subject that, in spite of the fact that, due to the fact that, in the event that, because of the fact that, until such time as, by means of*

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO VIEW ALL SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF WRITING VISIT:
www.hamilton.edu/writingresources