

## ELIMINATING WORDINESS

We all want to communicate clearly, but wordy sentence constructions can mask the best of ideas. In an effective sentence, every word serves a purpose and occupies the right spot. The suggestions below may help you to compose clearer, more concise sentences.

*Note that addressing one source of wordiness often results in addressing several.* Revising the sentence “Lydia’s accusation of Elizabeth was unfair” to “Lydia unfairly accused Elizabeth” accomplishes the following:

- It places the doer of the action, “Lydia,” in the subject position
- It replaces the noun form, “accusation,” with the verb form, “accused”
- It replaces a form of the verb *to be*, “was,” with an active verb, “accused”

Together, these changes create a stronger, more concise sentence.

**Use the key noun (the doer of the action) as the subject of the key verb (the main action in the sentence). Also aim to use Action Verbs and avoid overusing forms of to be (is, are, was, were, ...).**

*Example:* Usner’s work is an attempt at revision of orthodox historiography.

*Revision:* Usner attempts to revise orthodox historiography.

*Example:* An example of thorough analysis is when Tierney cites Wiseman’s extensive data.

*Revision:* Tierney’s citing of Wiseman’s extensive data exemplifies thorough analysis.

*Practice:* The reason that the author uses this language is to emphasize Jonah’s grief.

**Use active voice rather than passive voice verbs.**

Passive voice verbs are composed of a form of the verb *to be* and the past participle of the main verb (e.g., “are composed”). Passive voice creates sentences in which the subject noun receives rather than does the action and the doer of the action often is not stated.

Use the active voice when it is important to know who or what performs the action.

*Example:* The process of modernization in any society *is seen* as a positive change.  
(Who sees it as positive?)

*Revision:* Most people see modernization in a society as a positive change.

*Example:* Donner’s misuse of information *is exposed* by the facts.

*Revision:* The facts expose Donner’s misuse of information.

*Practice:* In the poem, it *is suggested* that love is fleeting.

Jefferson’s support for the constitution *was documented* in a letter to Madison.

Yeager’s interpretation of the text *is illustrated* by comparing the original to the revision.

A one-story thesis may be adequate for some situations, but it is limited in scope, and your reader is unlikely to find a one-story-thesis challenging or engaging. Why stay on the ground floor when you can see the view from above?

**Avoid unnecessary language.**

*(Examples: this shows that, this serves as a way to, this is an example of, the reason why is, because of the fact, due to the fact, in the event of, by means of, ...)*

*Example:* Successful globalization depends on factors that involve culture more than economics.

*Revision:* Successful globalization depends more on culture than economics.

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

*Revision:* The novel *Tom Jones* comically portrays eighteenth century English society.

*Practice:* Emerson observed that nature is what can provide resources for innovation.

### **Use nouns rather than vague pronouns as subjects.**

*Example:* There are indications of Privo's misunderstanding of natural selection in her argument.

*Revision:* Privo's argument demonstrates her misunderstanding of natural selection.

*Practice:* It is Ryan's combination of limited evidence and excessive sarcasm that seriously weakens the argument.

### **Use verbs rather than nouns to express action.**

Use of nouns formed from verbs (called nominalizations, often ending in -ence, -ness, -tion) weakens the action. Verbs are stronger, more powerful word choices.

*Example:* Modern society is in need of a recalibration of its moral values.

*Revision:* Modern society needs to recalibrate its moral values.

*Example:* Attempts by economists at defining full employment have been met with failure.

*Revision:* Economists' attempts at defining full employment have failed.

*Practice:* The intention of the president was simplification of the review process.

### **Avoid a string of prepositional phrases.**

*Example:* One of the most important indications of the sensorimotor period is the development of object permanence.

*Revision:* The development of object permanence is a key indicator of the sensorimotor period.

*Practice:* Engels includes graphic descriptions of living conditions for the urban poor.