Clarity and Concision Part I: Redundant Language

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Clarity and Concision because…

► You should care about your reader

► One confused reader is one too many

► Readers can't agree with you (or award you grant money) if they give up on understanding your meaning
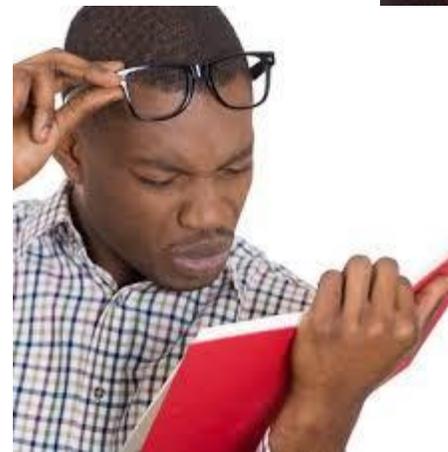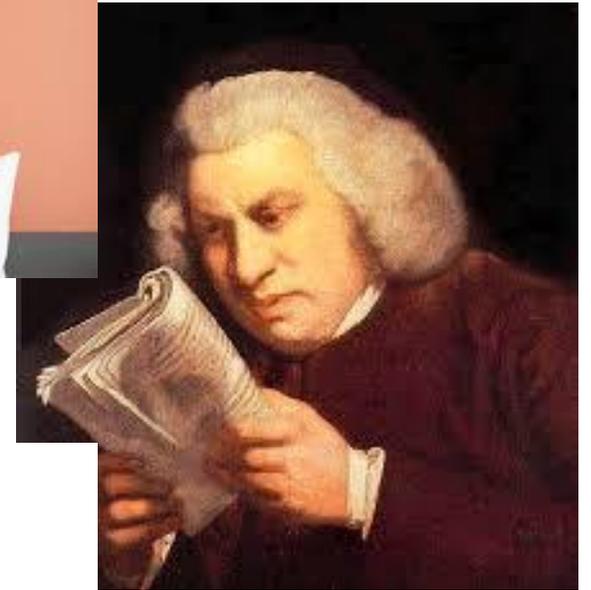
Remember…

- Practicing finding and eliminating wordiness in your own writing will lead to stronger writing from the beginning. This is the same for any writing concern we may discuss.

  - Working with your own writing is much more effective than working from sample/textbook exercises in terms of improving your own writing.

- As you draft, aim for short, focused, and simple sentences (for more on this, see our guide to "Building Better Sentences."

Consider the following phrases…

- Evil villains
- Dead corpses
- Added bonus
- Unexpected surprise
- Hopeful optimism

These phrases are all examples of redundant language.

► Evil villains

► Dead corpses

► Added bonus

► Unexpected surprise

► Hopeful optimism

"The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do."

– Thomas Jefferson

Source: Walton.uark.edu

- All villains are evil, all corpses are dead, and any bonus is something additional! Thus, these phrases all include unnecessary language.

- Often, when we are drafting (and especially when we are trying to "sound smart"), we use more words than we need. This can lead to confusion and frustration for our readers.

- During revision and editing, ask yourself if you have used the best word choice or if there are unnecessary adjectives you could cut.

More Redundant Language: Here are some common wordy phrases to avoid.

Wordy	Concise
at all times	always
at that point in time	then
due to the fact that	because
for the purpose of	for
in order to	to
in spite of the fact that	although

Hint: use ctrl+f to search your drafts for these phrases or other words you know you overuse.

Source: Lunsford

For your consideration: do the following sentences contain unnecessary language?

▶ "GET OFF THE PHONE," he yelled angrily.

▶ She stretched her arms and yawned sleepily.

▶ The panel of experts thoughtfully considered the proposal.

These sentences all include adverbs that might be considered unnecessary.

- "GET OFF THE PHONE," he yelled **angrily**.
- She stretched her arms and yawned **sleepily**.
- The panel of experts **thoughtfully** considered the proposal.

"I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs, and I will shout it from the rooftops."
~ Stephen King

  - "Angrily," sleepily," and "thoughtfully" are all adverbs. An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, adjective, or other word group. Adverbs often end n -ly.

    - Some writers, including creative writer Stephen King, believe adverbs are unnecessary in most cases. For example, King would say the first sentence above does not need the word "angrily" because readers should already know the character is yelling out of anger due to the content of the story leading up to this sentence.
    - When you find yourself using a word ending in -ly, ask yourself if you are including necessary information or just an extra word.

More Tips for Finding Redundant Language

► When reading a sentence, bracket off all unnecessary information. Ask yourself if the extra words are "vacuous fluff" or stylistic choices.

  ► Example: Additionally, Mlle Reisz supports Edna's emotional exploration through collaborative reflection.

  ► If you are unsure about a word, take it out and read the sentence: does it still make sense? Is your full meaning still conveyed? Then cut it out! In the sentence above, though, the author might decide to keep all words. She keeps "Additionally" because of the transition it provides. She includes "emotional" because there are many types of exploration and she keeps "collaborative" because otherwise "reflection" might suggest only one person engages in the action.

► Search your writing (ctrl+f) for uses of *ly, it is, there is,* and *there are* (these last three are clues your sentence could be rewritten in active voice). Delete and rewrite as needed.

► You might also search your writing for the words "really," "quite," and "very," three notoriously "empty words."

In Closing…

If you are composing in Word, pay attention to Grammar Check's suggestions for change, which often include moving from passive voice to active voice. For more on passive and active voice, see our next PowerPoint in the Clarity and Concision series!

Editing Tips

- Always take a break from your work. Give your brain a rest and don't try to edit immediately after drafting—you are less likely to see your mistakes then.

- Read your paper out loud. Seriously. Do it. This helps you slow down and to hear what your writing sounds like. If you become confused or run out of breath while reading your own work, it's a good sign you need to rewrite or shorten a sentence!

- Read your paper backwards (start with the last sentence). Again, this helps your brain slow down and look at each sentence on its own.

- Read your work on a different medium (i.e. paper vs. screen) or change font.

- Seek out low-stakes peer review opportunities.

Another way to make your writing easier to proofread

Find and Replace

Find | Replace | Go To

Find what: `.`

Replace with: `.^p^p`

More >>   Replace   Replace All   Find Next   Close

1. Use "replace" feature to make periods signal a new paragraph.

2. Use "sort" feature to arrange sentences in alphabetical order.

Sort Text

Sort by

Paragraphs   Type: Text   ○ Ascending ● Descending

Then by

Type: Text   ● Ascending ○ Descending

Then by

Type: Text   ● Ascending ○ Descending

My list has

○ Header row   ● No header row

Options...   OK   Cancel
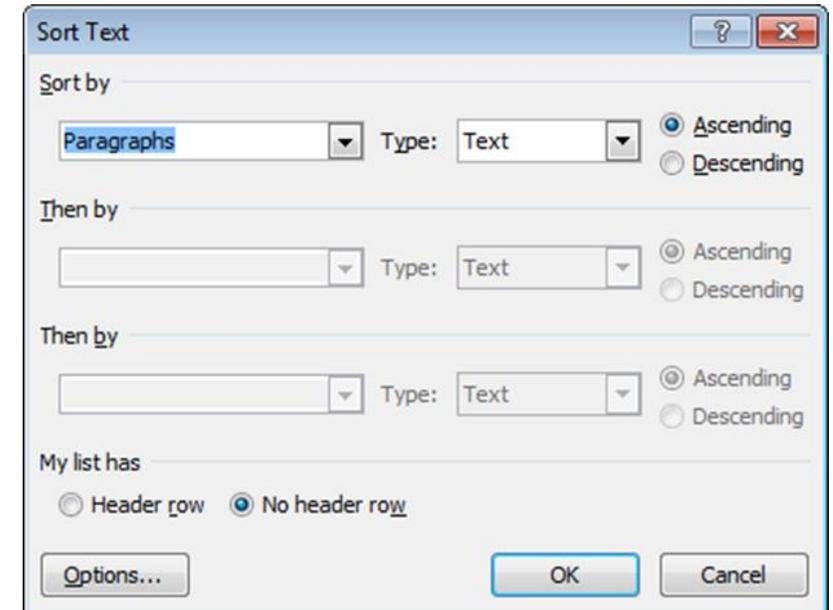
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Find us on Facebook (facebook.com/ugawriting) and Instagram (@UGAwritingcenter)!

▶ For more information, visit our website:

https://www.english.uga.edu/writing-center

Suggested Educational Resources Outside of UGA

▶ UNC Chapel Hill's Writing Center: Tips and Tools

▶ Purdue Writing Lab

▶ Naval Post Graduate Writing Center

▶ Writing Commons

Works Cited and Consulted

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