

Trimming the Fat: The Importance of Conciseness

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

— William Strunk Jr.
Elements of Style

Redundancy- the unnecessary repetition of words or ideas.

- Avoid saying the same thing twice:

As a community service project, I decided to be a reading tutor to illiterate adults who could not read.

- Avoid repetitious phrases:

The car circled around the block at 3am in the morning.

- Avoid redundancy in abbreviations:

ATM machine; CPU unit; PIN number

Reducing Unnecessary Words- often clauses and phrases can be reduced to just a few or even a single word, especially clauses beginning with *which* or *who*.

-The church, which was completed in 1875, dominated the skyline.

-Completed in 1875, the church dominated the skyline.

-The man, who was intelligent, built a time machine.

-The intelligent man built a time machine.

Intensifiers- words intended to amplify adjectives: use them only sparingly, as they add little meaning

-really, very, quite, severely, highly, greatly, incredibly, truly, extraordinarily, etc.

Expletive Constructions- phrases beginning with *there is/are* or *it is*: these weaken the impact of the sentence.

-There are twelve children who would like ice cream.

-Twelve children would like ice cream.

-It is he who stole the car.

-He stole the car.

Phrases That Can Be Omitted- watch for phrases that are used to fill space but add no meaning to the sentence.

-all things considered, as a matter of fact, as far as I'm concerned, at the present time, due to the fact that, the fact is that, for the most part, have a tendency to, in a very real sense, in my opinion, it seems that, the point I am trying to make is, what I mean to say is, etc.

Clichés- phrases that were once original, but have been so over-used that they are now trite and even annoying.

-As a mayor of Houston once said, "I wanted all my ducks in a row, so if we did get into a posture, we could pretty much slam-dunk this thing and put it to bed."

-better late than never, easier said than done, meaningful experience, ripe old age, sad but true, take the bull by the horns, to make a long story short, crushing blow, crack of dawn, white as a sheet, climbing the ladder of success, planting the seed, etc.