

Wordiness can be a **macro** or a **micro** issue. Macro wordiness is usually an organizational issue; it commonly appears as returning to one idea or related ideas, spread throughout a paper, creating repetition that could be easily culled if the information was put in once place. (Exception: sometimes you have to talk about the same topic in several different contexts; that's not wordiness.)

To identify and fix it, revise the organization after you've written the rough draft:

1. Label each sentence or group of sentences based on subject matter.
2. Cut and paste to put all related sentences together in one spot.
3. Line edit for clarity, conciseness and style within each section.
4. Test macro-organization with a Topic Sentence Outline.

Ways to reduce micro, or sentence-level wordiness:

1. Eliminate unnecessary determiners and modifiers:

Any *particular type of* movie is fine with me.

She is a *totally* unique woman.

Those programs share *common* similarities.

These are *true* facts.

2. Change phrases into single words:

The employee with ambition... vs. The ambitious employee

The department showing the best performance vs. The best-performing department...

3. Change unnecessary **that, who and which** clauses into modifying phrases:

The report, which was released recently... vs. The recently released report

All applicants who are interested in the job... vs. All job applicants...

The system that is most efficient and accurate... vs. The most efficient and accurate system...

4. Replace roundabout expressions with direct ones:

She was aware of the fact that

She knew

Due to the fact that

because/since

Despite the fact that

although

At the present time

now/today/currently

5. Use repetition only when it accomplishes a purpose (usually to emphasize or clarify an idea):

Ex: "... promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Ex: "a government of the people, by the people, for the people..."

Syntax Tip for Reducing Wordiness: Generally speaking, it is best to use **Active** instead of **Passive** sentence structures.

General Advice: If worrying about wordiness distracts you as you write a rough draft, forget about wordiness. Get your thoughts onto paper, and if that means overwriting first and trimming and editing later, so be it. But when you do revise, *make every word **earn** its way into your paper.*

To practice: Take any suspect paragraph (i.e. one that you think is wordy, or that your teacher has identified as such), and count the words in it. Then set the goal of editing it until you have reduced it by 25%, without losing any content.

Wordiness Exercise: Read the following sentences and write alternative versions that eliminate as much wordiness as you can.

1. For all intents and purposes, American industrial productivity generally depends on certain factors that are really more psychological in kind than of any given technological aspect.
2. Joe Smith, our Chief Executive Officer, suggested at our last board meeting the installation of microfilm equipment in the department of data processing.
3. It is imperative that we find a solution.
4. The federal court issued an opinion that gave support to the course of action taken by the plaintiff.
5. It goes without saying that we are acquainted with your policy on filing tax returns, and we have every intention of complying with the regulations that you have mentioned.
6. It was found by the judge that the defendant was in violation of the statute.

Concise versions:

1. For all intents and purposes, American industrial productivity generally depends on certain factors that are really more psychological in kind than of any given technological aspect.

Better: *American industrial productivity depends more on psychological than on technological factors.* (26 words to 11)

2. Joe Smith, our Chief Executive Officer, suggested at our last board meeting the installation of microfilm equipment in the department of data processing.

Better: *At our last board meeting, CEO Smith suggested that we install microfilm equipment in the data processing department.* (23 words to 18)

3. It is imperative that we find a solution.

Better: *We must find a solution.* (8 words to 5)

4. The federal court issued an opinion that gave support to the course of action taken by the plaintiff. (18 words)

Better: *The federal court opinion supported the plaintiff's course of action.* (10 words)

The federal court opinion supported the plaintiff. (7 words)

The federal court found for the plaintiff. (7 words)

Or: The federal court sanctioned the Plaintiff's decision to do X.

5. It goes without saying that we are acquainted with your policy on filing tax returns, and we have every intention of complying with the regulations that you have mentioned.

Better: *We intend to comply with the tax-return regulations that you have mentioned.* (29 words to 12)

6. It was found by the judge that the defendant was in violation of the statute.

Better: *The judge found that the defendant violated the statute.* (15 words to 8)

Other options: The defendant violated the statute, according to the judge.
The defendant violated the statute, the judge found.

Active vs. Passive Sentence Structures

Active: The subject of the sentence is also the agent doing the verb action.

Ex: “She hit the ball.” (“she” is the subject, and also the agent doing the hitting)

Passive Type 1 (missing agent): “The ball was hit.”

Passive Type 2 (agent is not the subject): “The ball was hit by her.”

Three Problems with Passives:

1. Lack of clarity – we can’t tell who is doing what to whom

2. Wordiness -- A passive sentence with the same amount of content is usually wordier than an active alternative.

Ex: The account was opened by Mrs. Simms. vs. Mrs. Sims opened the account.

Ex: Your figures were checked by the research department.

vs. The research department checked your figures.

3. Over-use of “to be” verbs, and nominalization – the process of turning verbs into nouns, often nouns that end in “-ion”: realization instead of realize, recognition instead of recognize, anticipation instead of anticipate.

3 Steps to revise from passive to active:

1. Identify the main verb action in a sentence.

2. Identify who is doing that verb action.

3. Make that person the agent.

Example: There is anticipation of higher profits next quarter.

Example: In that course, there was discussion but no comprehension of the material.