*Wordy Sentences*

Long sentences are not necessarily wordy, nor are short sentences always concise. A sentence is wordy if its meaning can be conveyed in fewer words.

**A. Eliminate redundancies.**

Redundancies such as *cooperate together, close proximity, basic essentials*, and *true fact* are a common source of wordiness. There is no need to say the same thing twice.

- Chinese Canadians were portrayed ~~or stereotyped~~ as lazy even though they were essential to the labour force in the West.

*works*

- Jing-wei ~~is employed~~ at a private rehabilitation centre ~~working~~ as a registered physical therapist.

Although modifiers ordinarily add meaning to the words they modify, occasionally they are redundant.

- Sylvia ~~very~~ hurriedly scribbled her name, address, and phone number on the back of a greasy napkin.

- Joel was determined ~~in his mind~~ to lose weight.

**B. Avoid unnecessary repetition of words.**

Although words may be repeated deliberately, for effect, repetitions will seem awkward if they are clearly unnecessary. When a more concise version is possible, choose it.

- Our fifth patient, in room six, is ~~a~~ mentally ill ~~patient~~.

*grow*

- The best teachers help each student to ~~become a better student~~ both academically and emotionally.

**C. Cut empty or inflated phrases.**

An empty phrase can be cut with little or no loss of meaning. Common examples are introductory word groups that apologize or hedge: *in my opinion, I think that, it seems that, one must admit that,* and so on.

*Our*

- ~~In my opinion, our~~ current policy on environmental issues is misguided on several counts.

Inflated phrases can be reduced to a word or two without loss of meaning.

*Inflated* *Concise*

along the lines of like

as a matter of fact in fact

at all times always

at the present time now, currently

at this point in time now, currently

because of the fact that because

by means of by

due to the fact that because

for the purpose of for

for the reason that because

have the ability to be able to

in the nature of like

in order to to

in spite of the fact that although, though

in the event that if

in the final analysis finally

in the neighbourhood of about

until such time as until

*if*

- We will file the appropriate papers ~~in the event that~~ we are unable to meet the deadline.

**D. Simplify the structure.**

If the structure of a sentence is needlessly indirect, try simplifying it. Look for opportunities to strengthen the verb.

- The financial analyst claimed that because of volatile market conditions she could not ~~make an~~ estimate ~~of~~ the company’s future profits.

\*The verb *estimate* is more vigorous and more concise than *make an estimate of*.

The colourless verbs *is, are, was,* and *were* frequently generate excess words.

*monitors and balances*

- The administrative secretary ~~is responsible for monitoring and balancing~~ the budgets for travel, contract services, and personnel.

The expletive constructions *there is* and *there are* (or *there was* and *there were*) can also generate excess words. The same is true of expletive constructions beginning with *it*.

*Another*

- ~~There is another~~ videotape ~~that~~ tells the story of Charles Darwin and introduces the theory of evolution.

*Hikers must*

- ~~It is important that hikers~~ remain inside the park boundaries.

Finally, verbs in the passive voice may be needlessly indirect. When the active voice expresses your meaning as well, use it.

*our coaches have recruited*

- All too often, athletes with marginal academic skills ~~have been recruited by our coaches~~.

**E. Reduce clauses to phrases, phrases to single words.**

Word groups functioning as modifiers can often be made more compact. Look for any opportunities to reduce clauses to phrases or phrases to single words.

- We took a side trip to Orillia, ~~which was~~ the home of Stephen Leacock.

*leather pants*

- Susan’s stylish ~~pants, made of leather,~~ were too warm for our summer temperature.

Exercise A: Edit the following sentences to reduce wordiness.

1. The town of Banff, located in Alberta, was founded as a vacation spot for British travellers.
2. In the early eighties, some analysts viewed Soviet expansion as an effort to achieve nothing less than world dominance, if not outright control of the world.
3. You will be the departmental travel coordinator for all members of the department.
4. A typical autocross course consists of at least two straightaways, and the rest of the course is made up of numerous slaloms and several sharp turns.
5. The price of driving while drunk or while intoxicated can be extremely high.