

demands of schoolwork and extracurricular activities (such as sports, civic clubs, debate teams, band) and the expectations of employers, a balance many high school students are simply not mature enough to handle on their own, often choosing the immediate material goods furnished by a job over the less obvious benefits afforded by a good education.

2. Many parents, however, aware of the limitations of their own education in school, may believe that it is no more important to learn square roots, the capitals of Asian countries, or the metrics of Chaucer's poetry than it is to discover how tough it is to deal with customers, show up on time, manage other workers, or pay taxes, experiences that an after-school job will quickly give most teenagers, whose images of work are badly distorted by films and television.

04 Use charts and graphs to present quantitative information. Readers grasp numbers and statistics much more quickly when they see them presented visually. See Section 18d for more on how charts and graphs work and for advice on incorporating them into your writing.

17C How can you reduce wordiness?

For those who aspire to be good writers, the war against "clutter" never ends. Clutter consists of clichés, strung-out phrases, pointless repetitions, and florid descriptions. But wait until you have a first draft before you start trimming your prose. Many writers overstuff a first draft because they want to get all their ideas down. That's fine: it is easier to cut material during revision than to create more.

01 Condense sprawling phrases. Some long-winded expressions slow a reader's way into a sentence, especially at the beginning.

WHY WRITE . . .

in the event that
in light of the fact that
on the grounds that
regardless of the fact that
on the occasion of

WHEN YOU COULD WRITE . . .

if
since
because
although
when

in today's society
it is clear that
on an everyday basis
with regard/respect to
for

now

clearly
routinely

We are so accustomed to these familiar but wordy expressions that we don't notice how little they convey.

WORDY At this point in time, the committee hasn't convened.
REVISED The committee hasn't convened yet.

EXERCISE 17.10 Revise the following sentences to eliminate the sprawling, wordy, or clichéd opening phrase.

1. On the occasion of the newspaper's seventy-fifth anniversary, the governor visited the editorial offices.
2. Regardless of the fact that I have revised the speech three times, I still don't like my conclusion.
3. In the modern American society in which we live today, many people still attend church regularly.
4. By virtue of the fact that flood insurance rates are so high, many people go uninsured, risking their property.

02 Cut nominalizations. **Nominalizations** are nouns made by adding endings to verbs and adjectives. The resulting words tend to be long and abstract. Worse, nominalizations are often grafted onto terms that are themselves recent coinages of dubious merit.

WORD	NOMINALIZATION
connect	connectivity
customize	customization
historicize	historicization
utilize	utilization
prioritize	prioritization
victimize	victimization

Unfortunately, writers in college, business, and government sometimes think that readers will be more impressed by prose laden with these grand abstractions. However, writing full of nominalizations can exhaust readers

and often obscures meaning. When possible, replace nominalizations with simpler terms.

WORDY A **falsification** of evidence has occurred.

REVISED Someone falsified evidence.

WORDY An **intensification** of volcanic activity in Alaska is expected.

REVISED Volcanic activity in Alaska will likely intensify.

EXERCISE 17.11 Revise the following sentences to reduce nominalizations that make the prose wordy. You may make other cuts as well.

1. The registrar's note is a clarification of the school's admissions policy.
2. It is a matter of substantial disputation among sociologists whether the gentrification of urban neighborhoods is a beneficial process to inner-city residents.
3. The utilization of creative writing in more and more elementary language arts classes is an indication that many teachers are feeling dissatisfaction with older, more rigid approaches to language instruction.
4. The systems analyst convinced us that the connectivity and interchangeability of our equipment gave our new computer system enhanced potential.

03 Condense long verb phrases to focus on the action. To show tense and mood, verb phrases need auxiliaries and helping verbs: I *could have* gone; she *will be* writing. But many verb phrases are strung out by unnecessary clutter.

WHY WRITE . . .

give consideration to
make acknowledgment of
have doubts about
is reflective of
has an understanding of
put the emphasis on

WHEN YOU COULD WRITE . . .

consider
acknowledge
doubt
reflects
understands
emphasize

Similarly, don't clutter active verbs with expressions such as *start to*, *manage to*, and *proceed to*. They usually don't add much to a sentence.

CLUTTERED VERBS

Malls and supermarkets **always manage to irritate me** when they **start to display** Christmas paraphernalia immediately after Halloween.

REVISED

Malls and supermarkets **irritate me** when they **display** Christmas paraphernalia immediately after Halloween.

EXERCISE 17.12 Revise the following sentences to condense long verb phrases into more active expressions.

1. Many people are of the opinion that the federal government has grown too large.
2. An almost equal number of people hold the conviction that many citizens have need of services provided by federal programs.
3. This difference in public opinion is indicative of the dilemma faced by many politicians today.
4. Their constituents often are not in favor of paying for exactly the services that they have expectations of getting.

04 Eliminate doublings and redundancies. *Doublings* are expressions in which two words say exactly the same thing. One word can usually be cut.

trim ~~and slim~~

~~proper and fitting~~

ready ~~and able~~

willing ~~and eager~~

Redundancies are expressions in which a concept is repeated unnecessarily.

Our entire society has been corrupted by ~~the evil of~~ greed.

Mother's holiday feast on the table was surrounded by our family ~~sitting around it~~.

One might argue, in some cases, that doublings subtly expand the intended meaning. But they usually don't.

Thanksgiving fosters a sense of belonging ~~and togetherness~~.

I am of two worlds, which are forever at odds ~~with each other~~.

Many habitual expressions are in fact redundant.

WHY WRITE . . .

trading activity was heavy
of a confidential nature
her area of specialization
red in hue

WHEN YOU COULD WRITE . . .

trading was heavy
confidential
her specialty
red

Avoid the repetition of major words in a sentence—unless there are good reasons to emphasize particular terms.

REPETITIOUS

When college **friends come** together, you'll inevitably find some **friends** who **come** from the same background.

REVISED

When college **friends come** together, you'll inevitably find some who share the same background.

EXERCISE 17.13 Rewrite the following sentences to reduce redundancy and wordiness.

1. I realized that if I were ever to reach law school, I would have to increase my competitiveness in the skill of written prose composition.
2. *Ellen* to me is a daytime talk type of television show.
3. Many traits characterize a truly excellent student adviser, and one of the more important qualities, if not the most important quality, is a lively personality.

5 Eliminate surplus intensifiers. An adverb that functions as an intensifier should add weight or power to an expression. You waste its energy when you use it carelessly.

WHY WRITE . . .

We're **completely** finished.
It's an **awful** tragedy.
I'm **totally** exhausted.
That's **absolutely** pointless.
The work is **basically** done.

WHEN YOU COULD WRITE . . .

We're finished.
It's a tragedy.
I'm exhausted.
That's pointless.
The work is done.

EXERCISE 17.14 Review the intensifiers in the following passage and cut any words or phrases you regard as unnecessary.

The Grand Canyon is a quite unique geological treasure in northwestern Arizona, basically formed by the relentless power of the Colorado River cutting a gorge for many, many eons through solid rock. Standing at the edge of the canyon is a totally awesome experience. The canyon walls drop far into the depths, thousands of feet, a seriously deep drop, exposing very different layers of limestone, sandstone, and volcanic rock. These really magnificent canyons recede into the distance like ancient castles, an absolutely remarkable panorama of color and shadow.

6 Cut down on expletive constructions. Expletives are short expressions such as *it was*, *there are*, and *this is* that function like starting blocks for pushing into a sentence or clause. For example:

It was a dark and stormy night.

There were five of us huddled in the basement.

There are too many gopher holes on this golf course!

It is a proud day for Bluefield State College.

Some expletives are unavoidable. But using them habitually to open your sentences will make your prose tiresome. In many cases, sentences will be stronger without the expletives.

WITH EXPLETIVE

Even though **it is** the oldest manufacturer of automobiles, Mercedes-Benz remains innovative.

EXPLETIVE CUT

The oldest manufacturer of automobiles, Mercedes-Benz remains innovative.

WHY WRITE . . .

There is a desire for
There are reasons for
There was an expectation
It is clear that
It is to be hoped

WHEN YOU COULD WRITE . . .

We want
For several reasons
They expected
Clearly
We hope

EXERCISE 17.15 Revise the following sentences to eliminate unnecessary expletive constructions.

1. There are many different ways to fulfill the science requirement at most colleges.
2. It is usually the case that liberal arts majors are more suited for science courses that are geared to the history of the field.
3. Enrolling in a course in the natural sciences is a challenge, and it should be taken seriously.
4. This is a point that many science teachers make early in a term, but it is a concept that many students don't grasp until after their first examination.

● **7 Cut the number of prepositional phrases.** Stylistically, prepositional phrases are capable of dignity and grandeur, thanks to their clarity and simplicity.

In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.

... and that government **of the people, by the people, for the people,** shall not perish from the earth.

But that very simplicity can disappear if you pack too many prepositional phrases of similar length and tempo into one sentence.

TOO MANY PREPOSITIONS In late summer **on** the road **from** our town **into** the country, we expected to find raspberries **in** the fields **near** the highway **by** the recent construction.

REVISED We expected to find late summer raspberries **on** the country road, **near** the recent construction.

Also avoid strings of prepositional phrases that congeal around abstract nouns, making sentences thick and hard to read. In the example, the abstract nouns are boldfaced and prepositional phrases are underlined.

WORDY The current **proliferation** of credit cards among college students is the result of **extensive marketing** by banking institutions which see college students in terms of their future **affluence**.

Revise a cluttered sentence by looking for the center of action: *who* is doing *what* to *whom*?

REVISED Banks today are marketing credit cards to college students because they see them as affluent future customers.

For more on prepositional phrases, see Section 16c-1.

EXERCISE 17.16 Revise the following sentences to reduce the number of prepositional phrases where they make the sentences awkward or monotonous. Some sentences may require extensive revision.

1. J.R.R. Tolkien was the author of one of the most popular series of fantasy novels about the battle between good and evil forces in the distant past of the fictional world of Middle Earth.
2. Tolkien's series *The Lord of the Rings* focuses on the adventures of a genial hobbit by the name of Frodo Baggins and his sidekick by the name of Sam who, along with Frodo, becomes involved in the race to destroy a ring of magical but evil power.
3. The novels cover a long period of time, focusing on the colossal struggle for the magical ring and for the future of Middle Earth that goes on between Frodo and his allies and the forces of Sauron, the leader of the forces of evil.
4. In his own love of adventure, in his fascination with tales of heroism, and in his faith in the redemptive power of friendship, Tolkien resembled his beloved characters.

● **8 Cut relative pronouns (*that, which, who, whom*) when you can do it without changing the meaning of a sentence.**

Relative pronouns introduce many modifying clauses (see Section 16d-2). You can often cut them for economy.

WORDY The book **that I had quoted** was missing.

REVISED The book **I had quoted** was missing.

EXERCISE 17.17 Rewrite these sentences to practice eliminating relative pronouns (*that, which, who, whom*) that might be contributing to wordiness. Retain any such pronouns necessary for clarity.

1. Some of the people who might be willing to endure a little less environmental consciousness are parents of children whom environmental education programs have turned into Green Police.
2. Second graders who used to read Dr. Seuss stories suddenly can't wait to locate "Tips to Save Our Planet" in the daily newspaper, which carries dozens of slick, unrecyclable inserts.
3. Full of moral superiority, youngsters who can barely read are circulating petitions that condemn industries that emit CO₂.
4. Shrewd are the parents who steer their children's activist impulses in productive directions by asking them to read supermarket labels and to find the items that are marked "Recyclable."

● **9 Condense sentences into clauses and clauses into phrases or words.** Often a forceful word or two can do the work of several. Say more with less.

ORIGINAL

Queen Elizabeth I was a woman of a complex and sensuous nature. She seemed to have great passion for many men, yet she never came close to marrying any of her suitors.

CONDENSED

Complex and sensuous, Queen Elizabeth I seemed to love men, yet she never came close to marrying.

ORIGINAL

Thanksgiving is a time of holiday celebration for all of us to be together for the simple purpose of enjoying each other's company.

CONDENSED

Thanksgiving is a time for enjoying each other's company.

EXERCISE 17.18 Rewrite the following sentences to reduce clutter by substituting single words for wordy phrases. Rearrange the sentences as necessary.

1. In the event that you are in proximity to Greene County this weekend, you should not miss the opportunity to visit the autumn Concours d'Elegance, an annual exhibit of classic cars.
2. There is the possibility that you may have the chance to touch and feel many quite unusual and different vehicles, from dowdy Edsels with gearshift buttons in the middle of their steering wheels to tiny Corvairs with air-cooled engines under louvered deck lids at the back.

3. However, don't expect to make an inspection of the more unique makes and the basically timeless art of such prestigious automakers as Bugatti, Duesenberg, or Hispano-Suiza.
4. Regardless of the fact that Greene County's show is a small show, you can take great satisfaction in examining quite handsome old Hudsons, Nashes, Jaguars, and Corvettes that are tended by owners who are willing and eager to talk about them at great length.

Taking Control**Cut excess verbiage**

If an instructor describes your writing as wordy, ponderous, heavy, or slow-moving, you can usually fix the problem by cutting excessive verbiage. Practice on a paper you have already written. Begin by checking the word count on the document (you'll find a function for this under "Tools"), and then aim to reduce it by 10-15% without losing any content. Below is a paragraph from the NCAA's "Report on the Sportsmanship and Fan Behavior Summit," which dealt with the problem of fans rioting after athletic events. Below the 96-word original is a second, carefully edited version that is 18 words shorter. Which version is more readable? Why?

Opening is slow and formal.

Not clear *who* should do *what*.

Subject of the second sentence is vague abstraction: *positive relations*.

Conclusion is thick with prepositional phrases and doublings.

Original version: Because celebratory riots are not restricted to sporting events, the aforementioned campus/community communication techniques also should be practiced for non-athletics events. Positive relations between a campus and community can ensure there is a consistent level of enforcement in the campus community, regardless of the context (e.g., athletics events, political rallies, concerts). While the aforementioned policies and practices may cost institutions and communities valuable resources, decisions about whether to employ those techniques should be weighed against the toll taken on campuses and their surrounding communities in terms of property damage, potential lawsuits, and negative public perceptions.