Wordiness

What Creates It and How to Get Rid of It

What Creates Wordiness?

Draft vs. Final version

When drafting, you do not want to impede the flow of ideas by worrying about the details of wording and sentence structure, so you may use more words or phrases than necessary or become repetitive. The problem comes when you do not take the time to revise thoroughly and these elements of wordiness stay in the final essay.

Conversational style

People typically talk and think in a more casual style, which can involve extra words, clichés and empty phrases. But when writing for an academic, technical or scientific purpose, you must be more formal and direct.

Attempts to clarify

When struggling to communicate your ideas, you may find yourself writing around and around it in circles, trying to focus in on the actual concept. Often this is an issue with imprecise vocabulary.

Padding

If you are worried about meeting a certain page length or word count requirement, you might feel the need to repeat concepts or add unnecessary phrases to fill out the length. However, professors are good at spotting such padding, so it does not work.

How to Eliminate Wordiness

Omit ineffective subject-verb combinations like "it is," "there is," and "there are."
Wordy: There are thousands of fans who want a baseball team in our city.
Concise: Thousands of fans want a baseball team in our city.

Replace prepositional phrases with one-word modifiers.
Wordy: The president of the student government was in charge of the protest against the change in graduation requirements at the university.
Concise: The student government president led the protest against the university's change in graduation requirements.

Take out unnecessary repetition of key words and ideas.
Wordy: The city council decided to approve the request from the electric company. The proposal was presented by the electric company to ask for some tax money to help with the cost of burying the additional electric lines. The electric lines were needed because of the development of new housing.
Concise: The city council approved the electric company's request to provide tax money toward the cost of burying the additional electric lines needed because of new housing developments.

Combine two short sentences into one.
Wordy: The director is concerned about possible problems. Typical problems may occur with lighting, sound, and props.
Concise: The director is concerned about possible problems with lighting, sound and props.

Take out words that are implied by other words in the same sentence.
Wordy: The ceiling overhead had been painted an ugly green color. (Note, the ceiling is always overhead, and by definition, green is a color.)
Concise: The ceiling had been painted an ugly green.

Omit "which," "that" or "who" when possible.
Wordy: Because the meeting, which was long and boring, occurred on a Friday afternoon, the employees, who were ready for the weekend to begin, tried to leave early.
Concise: Because the long, boring meeting occurred on a Friday afternoon, the employees, ready for the weekend to begin, tried to leave early.

Avoid passive voice.
Wordy: An article about the dramatic court case was written by George Smith.
Concise: George Smith wrote an article about the dramatic court case.

Replace wordy stock phrases with more concise ones.

Wordy	Concise	Wordy	Concise	Regardless of the fact that	Although
At the present time	Now or currently	In the event that	If	In the near future	Soon
At all times when	Whenever	In connection with	About	As the case may be	(Delete)
Is of the opinion that	Thinks or Believes	In spite of the fact that	Although	Make a plan	Plan
Due to the fact that	Because	In view of the fact that	Because or Since	For the purpose of	To
During the time that	While	It is often the case that	Often or Usually	In regard to	About
For the purpose of	For or So that	On a frequent basis	Frequently or Often	Have an expectation of	Expect
Has the capability to	Can	Until such time as	Until	Ask a question	Ask
Cooperate together	Cooperate	The reason is because	Because		
Each and every	Each or Every	During the course of	During		