

Wordiness

More words count less. - Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

Wordiness is using too many words inefficiently. More than a matter of word count, wordiness involves using unnecessary words and/or phrases that add length to sentences while making only negligible differences to their meaning.

Tips on Avoiding Wordiness

- Read aloud! Unnecessary words and phrases often can be detected when text is read aloud.
- Change lengthy phrases into single words and “breathy” clauses into phrases when appropriate.
- Employ detail in moderation.
- Avoid “redundant pairs” and repetitive phrases.
- Use active instead of passive verbs.

The following examples show forms of wordiness and how they can be adjusted using fewer words.

WORDY

In a weird way, I sort of like it when Chris walks back and forth on my back.

unnecessary introductory phrase

unnecessary modifier (sort of)

redundant phrase

REVISED

I like it when Chris walks on my back.

WORDY

Yesterday ~~our people who routinely receive shipments~~ at the loading dock ~~were extremely surprised when they received a rather large excess of too many oranges~~. Please arrange with the people in your department ~~who perform supply coordination functions~~ to see to it that the ~~overly superfluous oranges~~ are taken care of as soon as ~~humanly~~ possible. ~~We truly appreciate your continued efforts to keep the loading area free of unsolicited crates oranges that take up space and were never ordered to begin with.~~

First sentence

Second sentence
excessive detail
& redundancy

Third sentence
Stating the obvious

REVISED

Yesterday we received too many oranges at the loading dock—please arrange with your supply department to have somebody pick them up as soon as possible.

WORDY

At the present time Ollie Octopus really thinks her ninth leg is an extra-added bonus.

common roundabout phrase

unnecessary modifier

redundant pair

REVISED

Now Ollie Octopus thinks her ninth leg is a bonus.

WORDY

Anybody who plays ping pong with the slightest trace of serious self-motivation should be prepared to play the game with lots of gusto that comes from the deepest parts of their innermost selves.

inefficient "Who" clause

excessive detail

redundant

phrase *be prepared to play* reduced to single word "play"

Repetitive wording – nearly entire phrase dropped, but idea of deep self remains

REVISED

Serious ping pong players should play with deep self-motivated gusto.

More Tips on Avoiding Wordiness

- Be aware of the words you use—extra words and/or awkward phrases creep into sentences when we write distractedly.
- Make sense first—worry about style later.
- Remember, you don't have to make a subject "sound" important by use fancy *high-falootin'* words. (Interestingly, Einstein wrote about relativity with plainspoken grace.)
- In some cases, wordiness is a *natural* by-product of the writing process—that is, early drafts are likely to be less concise than final drafts. This is OK—it helps writers capture all of their ideas, and their refine their communication.
- Be open to the possibility that your writing could use a trim. It's true for almost all writers!