



## Reducing Wordiness

### Use Action Verbs instead of Forms of “To Be”

- Overusing forms of the verb “to be” (is, was, were, etc.) can lead to unnecessarily wordy sentences.
  - To Be Verb Example: *The Weekly Ringer’s* articles are a reflection of students’ current concerns.
    - Action Verb Revision: *The Weekly Ringer* reflects students’ current concerns.
  - Example: The reason that the Speaking and Writing Center exists is to help students be more successful communicators.
    - Revision: The Speaking and Writing Center helps students to be more successful communicators.

### Use Active Voice instead of Passive Voice

- Active voice is when the subject of the verb is the one doing the action. (Ex. *She called* or *Her parents called her*)
- Passive voice is when the subject of the verb is the one receiving the action. (Ex. *She was called* or *She was called by her parents*)
- Using active voice instead of passive voice can lead to more direct, concise sentences.
  - Passive Voice Example: The Bell Tower is seen to be one of campus’s most recognizable landmarks.
    - Active Voice Revision: Students recognize the Bell Tower as a campus landmark.
  - Passive Voice Example: The CRUC was found to be a popular place to eat lunch among students.
    - Active Voice Revision: The CRUC is a popular place for students to eat lunch.



## Avoid Unnecessary Language

- Phrases such as *this shows that*, *this serves as a way to*, *this is an example of*, *the reason why is*, *because of the fact*, *due to the fact*, *in the event of*, *by means of*, etc. can often be eliminated to reduce wordiness.
  - Example: Bingo nights are an example of what makes Mary Washington unique.
    - Revision: Bingo nights make Mary Washington unique.
  - Example: Sammy D. Eagle is a mascot that makes students feel at home at UMW.
    - Revision: The mascot Sammy D. Eagle makes students feel at home at UMW.

## Avoid Using Demonstrative Pronouns as Subjects

- Demonstrative pronouns include *these*, *those*, *this*, *that*. Demonstrative pronouns, in writing, often cause wordiness because more explanation will be needed.
  - Example: That is my book.
    - Revision: My book has a red cover.
- Phrases like *there are*, especially at the beginning of a sentence, often add unnecessary phrases that can be removed to construct a more direct sentence.
  - Example: There are indications of what a modernized Mary Wash could look like in the design of Seacobeck.
    - Revision: The design of Seacobeck demonstrates what a modernized Mary Wash could look like.
  - Example: It is the small class sizes and authentic relationships that truly make Mary Washington unique.
    - Revision: Small class sizes and authentic relationships truly make Mary Washington unique.

**Speaking and Writing Center [1]:** What book is being pointed to? Further description would be needed.

**Speaking and Writing Center [2]:** While there are more words here, this sentence would likely eliminate the need for more description or explanation.



## Use Verbs instead of Nouns to Express Action

- Nominalizations (nouns formed from verbs, often ending in *-ence*, *-ness*, or *-tion*) weaken an action and tend to make a sentence wordier.
- Try to replace nominalizations with active verbs.
  - Example: Many buildings on campus are in need of a recalibration of their heating and cooling systems.
    - Revision: Many buildings on campus need to recalibrate their heating and cooling systems.
  - Example: Students' attempts to revitalize the defunct publication of *The Aubade* have been met with success.
    - Revision: Students succeeded in revitalizing the defunct publication of *The Aubade*.

**Speaking and Writing Center [3]:** Here, "recalibration" is a nominalization of the verb "recalibrate."

**Speaking and Writing Center [4]:** Here, the verb "recalibrate" has replaced the nominalization "recalibration."

**Speaking and Writing Center [5]:** Here, the verb "succeeded" was used to eliminate the nouns "attempts" and "success" from the original sentence.

## Avoid Strings of Prepositional Phrases

- A prepositional phrase is a group of words that consists of a preposition and a noun phrase. Prepositions are words that show direction or positional relationships such as *in*, *at*, *on*, *of*, *for*, *under*, *above*, *in front of*, *next to*, *beside*, *instead of*, etc.
- Constructions that rely on multiple prepositional phrases can often be revised to be more direct and concise.
  - Example: One of the most important aspects of the life of students on campus is the availability of a variety of food options.
    - Revision: A variety of food options is a key aspect of a student's campus life.
  - Example: One of the best places to study on campus is in the treehouses on the third floor of the library.
    - Revision: The third-floor library treehouses are a great place to study.
    - Revision: The third-floor library treehouses are one of the best places to study.

**Speaking and Writing Center [6]:** This is one example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [7]:** This is a second example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [8]:** This is a third example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [9]:** This is a fourth example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [10]:** This is a fifth example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [11]:** This is a sixth example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [12]:** This is an example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [13]:** This is a second example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [14]:** This is a third example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [15]:** This is a fourth example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [16]:** This is a fifth example of a prepositional phrase.

**Speaking and Writing Center [17]:** Notice that this revision still includes a prepositional phrase. Prepositional phrases are not inherently bad, but it's best to avoid long strings of them.



## Replace Verb-Adverb Combos with Stronger Verbs

- Adverbs often add unnecessary words to your sentences, especially when the meaning can be more effectively conveyed by a stronger verb.
  - Example: The study **convincingly showed** the connection between amount of sleep per night and stress levels among college students.
    - Revision: The study **proved** the connection between amount of sleep per night and stress levels among college students.
  - Example: The social media page **quickly grew** in popularity after the ad campaign.
    - Revision: The social media page **skyrocketed** in popularity after the ad campaign.

**Speaking and Writing Center [18]:** Here, we have an adverb-verb combo.

**Speaking and Writing Center [19]:** Here, proved is a much stronger verb, as it means to show something definitively or convincingly.

**Speaking and Writing Center [20]:** Here, we have an adverb-verb combo.

**Speaking and Writing Center [21]:** Skyrocketed is a much stronger verb because it means to grow very quickly, but it also provides a more vivid image associated with the action by implying the image of an explosion towards the sky.

## Remove Meaningless Intensifiers

- Intensifiers are adverbs that add force or emphasis.
- Meaningless intensifiers are intensifiers that add no new meaning or significance to the sentence.
- When multiple intensifiers are used together, one will usually suffice. Sometimes, both can be eliminated without affecting the meaning of the sentence.
- When meaningless intensifiers are paired with adverbs or adjectives, they can often be replaced by one stronger word.
- Look for these common meaningless identifiers and cut them from your writing:
  - Very
  - Really
  - Truly
  - Quite
  - Definitely
  - Many

## Examples

- Example: Vocelli's will **very** clearly be missed by the student body.
  - Revision: Vocelli's will clearly be missed by the student body.

**Speaking and Writing Center [22]:** Here, very is an intensifier that was removed from the revision.



- Example: Dean Cedric Rucker was quite truly an icon on campus.
  - Revision: Dean Cedric Rucker was truly an icon on campus.
  - Revision: Dean Cedric Rucker was quite an icon on campus.
  - Revision: Dean Cedric Rucker was an icon on campus.
- Example: The line to eat at the CRUC was really long during the specialty dinner.
  - The line to eat at the CRUC was huge during the specialty dinner.

**Speaking and Writing Center [23]:** Here, multiple intensifiers are used together.

**Speaking and Writing Center [24]:** Here, one of the two intensifiers was eliminated.

**Speaking and Writing Center [25]:** Here, another of the two intensifiers was eliminated.

**Speaking and Writing Center [26]:** In this revision, both intensifiers were removed.

**Speaking and Writing Center [27]:** Here, the intensifier really was used with the adjective long.

**Speaking and Writing Center [28]:** Here, the intensifier and adjective were replaced with a single, stronger adjective.

## Eliminate Redundant Word Pairs

- Redundant word pairs are pairs of words that people tend to use together that both mean the same thing.
- Many people use these word pairings as a way of creating emphasis, but this is often unnecessary.
- One of the words from these pairs should be eliminated:
  - first and foremost
  - each and every
  - any and all
  - hopes and desires
  - always and forever
  - final outcome
  - future plans
  - free gift
  - terrible tragedy
  - reflect back

## Examples

- Example: First and foremost, we must address the issue of equity.
  - Revision: First, we must address the issue of equity.
- Example: Reflecting back on the experience, I wish I had made better use of the peer support resources while I was in college.
  - Revision: Reflecting on the experience, I wish I had made better use of the peer support resources while I was in college.

**Speaking and Writing Center [29]:** Here, the redundant pair "first and foremost" was used.

**Speaking and Writing Center [30]:** Here, "first" on its own accomplished the same purpose as the redundant word pair "first and foremost."

**Speaking and Writing Center [31]:** Here, the redundant word pair "reflecting back" was used.

**Speaking and Writing Center [32]:** Here, only "reflecting" was used since "to reflect" means "to look back."