PART 1: TIGHTEN WORDY SENTENCES

There is a common misconception that long sentences are wordy, while short sentences are concise. If you can “shrink” the sentence without losing the meaning, then it is classified as wordy.

ELIMINATE REDUNDANCIES

Do not repeat yourself or use unnecessary words!

Consider this sentence:

Bill ran all the way back to the front end of the grocery store.
Consider its revision:

Bill ran to the grocery store.

*If Bill is running toward the grocery store, all we need is the verb “ran.”*

Consider this sentence:

Bobby caught his highest foul ball he has ever caught yet.

Consider its revision:

Bobby caught his highest foul ball yet.

*There is no need to repeat the action verb “caught.”*

Consider this sentence:

Ronald went to the farm to tend to the farm animals.

Consider its revision:

Ronald went to the farm to tend to the animals.

*Since we know he is going to the farm, it is inferred as to what type of animals he is working with.*

**AVOID UNNECESSARILY REPEATING WORDS**

Dr. Rufus, who has been a doctor for five years, is the best doctor in the Metropolitan area.

*The word doctor is used three times here. To avoid awkward sentence structure, try this.*

Dr. Rufus is the longest-tenured medical surgeon in the Metropolitan area.

*Here we replace “five years” with “longest tenured” and seek to properly define what type of doctor he is. This improves the clarity and adds some variety to our sentence.*

**PHRASING**

Cut empty or inflated phrases, such as *In my opinion, I think that, it seems that, one must admit that...*

Consider these sentences.

I think that Mr. Obama is the best president ever.

In my opinion, the fall of the Soviet Union helped quell the Cold War.

*These phrases are not necessary because your writing comes with an unwritten agreement – that what you say is your opinion or what you think.*
EXERCISES

PART 1: TIGHTEN WORDY SENTENCES

How would you tighten the following sentences?

1. The bird flew up in the air and around the tree to his nest.
2. Michael saw Christine coming around the corner as he was coming around the corner and said hello.
3. “Halloween” is the scariest movie Ben has seen out of all the movies he has seen.

PART 2: SIMPLIFY STRUCTURE

Make the structure of the sentence as direct as possible. This can be accomplished with the use of strong verbs.

Consider this sentence.

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

By shortening the phrase make an estimate of to estimate, the writer conveys the same message to the reader and is able to use stronger and more concise verbs.

NOTE: A good rule of thumb for identifying situations in which the structure can be simplified is to look for verbs such as is, was, and were. The presence of such verbs frequently generates excess words.

Consider this sentence.

My class was involved in studying the process by which a caterpillar burrows itself in a cocoon and becomes a butterfly.

By shortening the phrase My class was involved in studying to studied, the needless words generated by the word was (involved in) are eliminated. The much simpler verb phrase studied implies that the class (who, as the subject of the sentence, was performing the action of studying the caterpillar) was involved in the process. This revision is more direct and concise than the previous version.

Constructions such as there is and there are and there was and there were also generate excess words.

Consider this sentence.

There is a rule that states that all swimmers in the pool wear a life jacket.

Active versus passive voice can play a role in style and diction as well. When the meaning of a sentence can be effectively conveyed using the active voice, do so.

Consider the following sentence:
My brother continues to be pampered by my mother while I am away at college.

This sentence can be rewritten in the active voice:

While I am away at college, my mother pampers my brother.

EXERCISES

PART 2: SIMPLIFY STRUCTURE

How would you simplify the following sentences?

1. Sherman and Sheri both were involved in the process of writing the recommendation for Linda.
2. There is another book by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle that details the adventures of Sherlock Holmes.
3. It is necessary to stipulate that all students must wear uniforms on campus.
4. There was another doctor that recommended I have the same surgery.
5. An economic recession was named as the cause of the depressed housing market by financial analysts.
6. At this point in time I will leave Houston to complete my senior year of high school.

PART 3: REDUCE CLAUSES TO PHRASES AND PHRASES TO SINGLE WORDS WHEN POSSIBLE.

In the summer I visited South Africa, which was the site of the 2010 World Cup.

Again, notice the verb “was.” This can be eliminated to make the sentence more concise.

The state of modern day society challenges Martin Luther King Jr.’s notion that conflict can be settled by peaceful means, which is somewhat challenged in today’s war-torn society.

The construction “which is” sets off a needless phrase. By eliminating it, we make the sentence more concise and are able to convey the same meaning.

EXERCISES

PART 3: REDUCE CLAUSES TO PHRASES AND PHRASES TO SINGLE WORDS

How would you reduce clauses to phrases and phrases to single words in these sentences?

1. We made the trip to Graceland, which is the birthplace of Elvis.
2. We moved to a larger home in order that we may accommodate our growing family.
3. It is pretty important in being a fireman that one possesses the physical prowess as well as the technical knowledge.
4. Your task will be the delivery of correspondence to all employees in the company.
5. Mario will not leave the house until such time as his mother is well.
6. With his hamstring injury, Bob will not have the ability to move his leg for a week.
PART 4: LANGUAGE

Language is an important component of the writing process. When choosing which type of language to use, consider the following:

1. What is the genre or purpose of your writing? – Is this a business memo, scientific lab report, or an informal essay?
2. Who is the audience? – Is it the business community, scientific community, or your teacher?
3. Ultimately, your readership must be able to understand and comprehend your knowledge of the subject at hand.

TRY TO STAY AWAY FROM SENTENCES FILLED WITH JARGON.

As defined by The Bedford Handbook (Hacker 204), jargon is the use of sophisticated language designed to impress readers more than to inform them.

Consider this sentence.

All employees operating in the capacity of full-time interns must provide evidence that they can receive college credit for their projects completed with the company.

The construction “Employees operating in the capacity of . . .” is redundant and a sophisticated way of referring to interns. The construction “ . . . projects completed with the company” can be simplified to “work.”

AVOID PRETENTIOUS LANGUAGE.

Writers will often get carried away with the use of large words, flowery phrases and wordy language. This will have the unintentional effect of masking the true thoughts of the reader.

Consider this sentence:

The author pens the novel from the vantage point of Ella, a rather pretentious and self-serving individual who fails to comprehend the realities of her impoverished society.

Now consider this revision:

The novel is written from the point of view of Ella, a selfish woman who does not understand that she cannot live above her means.

The above sentence is more concise, and readers are able to clearly understand the qualities that Ella possesses. This will help them better understand the actions of the character.

EUPHEMISMS
In the context of an essay, we often use euphemisms. While these are also wordy and indirect, they can also be appropriate, or, as they say “politically correct.” As you can see, euphemisms can be used in situations where one must be polite and respectful. In social customs, we may use euphemisms to describe the process of excretion (as in, I must use the restroom) as well as engaging in sexual intercourse (as in, The two individuals slept together). However, most euphemisms only serve to dilute the intended meaning of the sentence.

Take a look at the following list for an example of some euphemisms and their plain English counterparts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Euphemism</th>
<th>Plain English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult entertainment</td>
<td>pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-owned automobile</td>
<td>Used car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Dependency</td>
<td>Drug addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downsize</td>
<td>Lay off or fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional facility</td>
<td>prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unmotivated</td>
<td>lazy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider this sentence:

The company is currently experiencing a negative cash flow.

Consider this revision:

The company is currently in debt.

“Negative cash flow” is a euphemism for “debt.”

AVOID SLANG.

Slang and nonstandard English are often used in informal conversations among close friends and is a more private vocabulary than we would use in professional communications within the business and academic world. Slang terms such as cool, groovy, and sick are meant to describe excitement about a particular activity. The term “posse” is slang for “group.” While slang is not widely accepted as language for an essay, it is interesting to note that several slang terms throughout the years have become part of common English. For example, “Jazz” was originally a slang term but is now commonly known as a style of music. Ultimately, the writer must realize that slang is a very informal type of language and therefore is not understood by everyone. This is a key aspect to consider when determining what type of language to use in an essay.

Consider this sentence:

The contents of most genetically modified foods would gross you out.

Consider the revised version:
The contents of most genetically modified foods would disgust you.

**AVOID REGIONAL EXPRESSIONS.**

Regional expressions are often common to a certain geographic area. Because of this, the ability for most readers to understand these expressions is limited.

See the following table for some examples of regional expressions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Expression</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parrot-toed</td>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td>Having feet that turn inward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>To leave or stay out of (school) without permission; to be truant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky blue</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>The game of hopscotch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run around</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>A swelling or infection in a finger, esp surrounding the nail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consider this sentence:**

Mike decided to ditch class because he had not completed his homework.

**Consider this revised version:**

Mike decided not to attend class because he had not completed his homework.

**AVOID NONSTANDARD ENGLISH.**

Nonstandard English is often used by people with a certain societal or cultural heritage. If you are writing about a certain time period or group of people, particularly in a creative essay or story, it may be appropriate to use that language in order to enrich the reading experience for your audience. However, do not use such language in formal, academic writing.

**Consider this sentence:**

“You gone and done it again, Miss Henrietta!” said Miss Maeby.

**If one was writing a creative story about the civil rights era and the South, the above dialogue might be considered acceptable, as it effectively conveys how individuals spoke during those times. Therefore, the use of such language would enhance the experience for the reader. However, if one was writing an academic essay, the above sentence might be translated to more conventional English.**

**Consider this revision:**
Miss Maebly was upset after Miss Henrietta continued to neglect her child yet again.

EXERCISES

PART 4: LANGUAGE

How would you simplify the language in these sentences?

1. Ernest will endeavor to cross the vast forest in an attempt to capture wild game that he can bring back to his impoverished family.
2. The tobacco industry is profitable, but it has left many individuals chemically dependent on nicotine.
3. As a result of the economic recession, the advertising agency was downsized by five employees.
4. The military often uses enhanced interrogation tactics to get the necessary information out of terrorists.
5. Billy was happy to receive his first car, even if it was pre-owned.

PART 5: USING THE WRITE (RIGHT) WORDS

SELECT WORDS WITH THE RIGHT CONNOTATIONS.

Connotations are defined as “the set of attributes constituting the meaning of a term and thus determining the range of objects to which that term may be applied” (Hacker 216). For example, the word “home” can bring about positive feelings of warmth and comfort and affection. Negative connotations can be associated with certain words depending on the reader, so you want to be careful about your word choice.

For example, take a look at these sentences:

When American soldiers returned home after World War II, many women abandoned their jobs in favor of marriage.

The word abandoned carries a far too negative connotation than is needed for this context. The word left carries a far more appropriate connotation.

Genetically modified foods are considered unhealthy, as they have been known to cause infertility and weight loss among cows.

The word unhealthy carries a weaker connotation than is needed for this context. The word dangerous carries a far more powerful connotation.

USE SPECIFIC, CONCRETE NOUNS.
General nouns refer to a broad range of things, but specific nouns can be used to point to particular items. For example, the word team can refer in a broader sense to a group or collection of individuals, be it in a workplace, academic setting, or athletic environment. The more specific noun “NFL team” gives a more narrow scope of our subject. We can get even more specific and name a certain team within the NFL, such as the San Francisco 49ers.

The use of concrete nouns allows us to give a more concise representation of our subject to the reader. They are more vivid in detail than general or abstract nouns.

For example, look at this sentence.

Barack Obama stated throughout his campaign that he would focus on combating unemployment during his presidency.

Now consider its revised form.

Barack Obama stated throughout his campaign that he would create more jobs in the private sector as well as provide benefits for those who are unemployed.

The revised sentence provides specific and precise reasons as to how he will combat unemployment, which in this context can be considered a broad term.

Nouns such as thing, area, aspect, factor, and individual are considered to be dull and imprecise. Be as specific as possible when speaking about attributes of a profession, product, or place.

Consider this sentence:

The individual with technical experience reconnected the elevator cable.

Consider its revised form:

The experienced technician reconnected the elevator cable.

The message conveyed to the reader by the author is the same, but the sentence is much stronger and more concise than before, as the non-descriptive term “individual” has been replaced with “experienced technician.”

Consider this sentence:

The novel Of Mice and Men is about a wide range of topics.

Consider its revised form.

The novel Of Mice and Men is about friendship, love, and loss.

Instead of the general phrase “wide range of topics,” the revised sentence provides the reader with more clarity. It is also more clearly focused, specifically naming friendship, love, and loss as themes of
the novel. This can be especially helpful within the context of an entire essay, where the reader can look to such a sentence to identify the main points of the essay.

BE CAREFUL WITH WORD USAGE.

Often if we do not understand the correct meaning of certain words and their various forms, we can find ourselves using the word in the wrong context or when we should be using a different adjective.

Consider this sentence:

Bill Shoman quarrels that genetically modified foods can create less diversity among food production.

Consider its revised form:

Bill Shoman argues that genetically modified foods can create less diversity among food production.

“Quarrels” is the wrong choice of word for this sentence, especially considering you are only presenting one viewpoint and not two.

Consider this sentence:

The theatergoers were migrating over the other patrons to find their seats before the show started.

Consider its revised form:

The theatergoers were climbing over the other patrons to find their seats before the show started.

“Migrating” does mean to move, but it is better reserved for the movement of animals from one area to another, and not for shorter distances of walking. Plus, the fact that they are moving is not so much important as how they are moving.

Consider this sentence:

The election of our first African-American president was a significance moment in our history.

Consider its revised form:

The election of our first African-American president was a significant moment in our history.

This sentence employs the wrong word form. This sentence requires the use of the adjective “significant” rather than the noun “significance.”

In order to use the noun “significance,” we must reformat the sentence as such:

The election of our first African-American president was a moment of great significance in our history.

EXERCISES

PART 5: USING THE WRITE (RIGHT) WORDS
Edit this sentence for any misused words.

1. The airline apologized for the delay in the flight and thanked everyone for their patients.

2. What might be a better word to use in the following sentence instead of “perspiration”?

   As I crossed the muddy terrain on my bicycle, the perspiration I had worked up streaked down my face before evaporating in the air.

   A. Sweat  
   B. Tears  
   C. Water

3. Given the details below, how would you make the sentence more concise?

   I considered many factors when choosing to go to Menlo College.

   - The distance from home is only 40 minutes.
   - I am receiving a scholarship.
   - The campus is very small.
   - The faculty is very experienced and well-connected.

4. How would you rephrase this sentence?

   In order to successfully complete her accounting internship, Mary felt she had to train with someone who possessed a vast range of experience in financial services.

Edit this sentence for any misused words.

5. The person who complained to the human resources manager wishes to remain unanimous.

**ANSWER KEY**

**PART 1: TIGHTEN WORDY SENTENCES**

How would you tighten the following sentences?

1. The bird flew up in the air and around the tree to his nest.
   
   **The bird flew to his nest.**

2. Michael saw Christine coming around the corner as he was coming around the corner and said hello.
   
   **Michael saw Christine coming around the corner and said hello.**
3. *Halloween* is the scariest movie Ben has seen out of all the movies he has seen.

“*Halloween*” is the scariest movie Ben has seen.

**PART 2: SIMPLIFY STRUCTURE**

How would you simplify the following sentences?

1. Sherman and Sheri both were involved in the process of writing the recommendation for Linda.

   Sherman and Sheri wrote the recommendation for Linda.

2. There is another book by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle that details the adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

   Another book by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle details the adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

3. It is necessary to stipulate that all students must wear uniforms on campus.

   All students must wear uniforms on campus.

4. There was another doctor that recommended I have the same surgery.

   Another doctor recommended I have the same surgery.

5. An economic recession was named as the cause of the depressed housing market by financial analysts.

   Financial analysts believed that an economic recession caused the depressed housing market.

6. At this point in time I will leave Houston to complete my senior year of high school.

   I will leave Houston to complete my senior year of high school.

**PART 3: REDUCE CLAUSES TO PHRASES AND PHRASES TO SINGLE WORDS**

How would you reduce clauses to phrases and phrases to single words in these sentences?

1. We made the trip to Graceland, which is the birthplace of Elvis.

   We made the trip to Graceland, the birthplace of Elvis.

2. We moved to a larger home in order that we may accommodate our growing family.
We moved to a larger home to accommodate our growing family.

3. It is pretty important in being a fireman that one possesses the physicality as well as the necessary technical knowledge.

   A fireman must possess the proper physicality as well as the necessary technical knowledge.

4. Your task will be the delivery of correspondence to all employees in the company.

   You will deliver mail to all employees.

5. Mario will not leave the house until such time as his mother is well.

   Mario will not leave the house until his mother is well.

6. With his hamstring injury, Bob will not have the ability to move his leg for a week.

   With his hamstring injury, Bob cannot move his leg for a week.

PART 4: LANGUAGE

How would you simplify the language in these sentences?

1. Ernest will endeavor to cross the vast forest in an attempt to capture wild game that he can bring back to his impoverished family.

   Ernest will try to cross the forest to capture wild game for his poor family.

2. The tobacco industry is profitable, but it has rendered many individuals chemically dependent on nicotine.

   The tobacco industry is profitable, but it has left many individuals addicted to nicotine.

3. As a result of the economic recession, the advertising agency was downsized by five employees.

   As a result of the economic recession, the advertising agency fired five employees.

4. The military often uses enhanced interrogation tactics to get the necessary information out of terrorists.

   The military often uses torture to get the necessary information out of terrorists.

5. Billy was happy to receive his first car as a gift, even if it was pre-owned.

   Billy was happy to receive his first car as a gift, even if it was used.

PART 5: USING THE WRITE (RIGHT) WORDS
1. The airline apologized for the delay in the flight, and thanked everyone for their **patience**.

   **The airline apologized for the delay in the flight, and thanked everyone for their patience.**

2. What might be a better word to use in the following sentence instead of “perspiration”?

   As I covered the crossed the muddy terrain on my bicycle, the perspiration I had worked up streaked down my face before evaporating in the air.

   - D. Sweat
   - E. Tears
   - F. Water

   **The activity described in the sentence requires a word with a stronger connotation than “perspiration.” Plus, readers are more familiar with the use of the word “sweat” than “perspiration.” B. and C. are not the best choice because the sentence requires a word with a stronger connotation than both choices.**

3. Given the details below, how would you make the sentence more concise?

   I considered many factors when choosing to go to Menlo College.

   - The distance from home is only 40 minutes.
   - I am receiving a scholarship.
   - The campus is very small.
   - The faculty is very experienced and well-connected.

   **I chose Menlo College because of the short distance from home, the size of the campus, the expertise of the faculty, and the fact that I am receiving financial assistance.**

4. How would you rephrase this sentence?

   In order to successfully complete her accounting internship, Mary felt she had to train with someone who possessed a vast range of experience in financial services.

   **In order to successfully complete her accounting internship, Mary felt she had to train with an experienced financial professional.**

   Edit this sentence for any misused words.

5. The person who complained to the human resources manager wishes to remain **anonymous**.

   **The person who complained to the human resources manager wishes to remain anonymous.**
REFERENCES


