

Wordiness

Wordy writing is inefficient. If more words are used than the meaning demands, they tend to get in the reader's way. Almost all writers, including professionals, use unnecessary words when they first draft out a piece – thoughts do not always present themselves in the most economical form. The revision stage, however, offers the opportunity to focus on the words rather than the ideas. A style that uses no unnecessary words will convey your meaning most clearly.

Here are a few patterns that may lead to wordiness:

1. Sentence beginning with **There is...** or **It is...**:

Don't let the subject position of the sentence be thrown away on a meaningless word like **there** if you can avoid it. Look for the real subject.

2. Unnecessary passive constructions:

Unless you have good reason to use a passive verb, cast your sentences in the active voice. Active sentences are not only briefer, but also stronger.

Wordy: The pygmy owl was once thought by scientists to be threatened.
Revised: Scientists once thought the pygmy owl was threatened.

3. Two or more sentences where one will do:

When successive short sentences are closely related, combining them often creates a better flow of thought.

Wordy: European settlers introduced several species of birds. These
 species include starlings and pigeons.
Revised: European settlers introduced several species of birds, including
 starlings and pigeons.

4. Unnecessary dependent clauses:

Dependent clauses can often be replaced by phrases.

Wordy: Because they had lived for centuries in association with man, these
 species quickly adapted to North American cities.
Revised: Having lived for centuries in association with man, these species
 quickly adapted to North American cities.

Relative clauses (clauses beginning with **who**, **which**, or **that**) are a common source of wordiness. In particular, clauses beginning with **which/who is...** can almost always be reduced to a single adjective or phrase.

Wordy: The path to the beach that was most direct led through a field, which was occupied by a bull.
Revised: The most direct path to the beach led through a field occupied by a bull.

5. Phrases taking the place of a single verb:

Verbs provide muscle to the sentence. Instead of a strong, specific verb, flabby sentences use an all-purpose verb and a noun. Some examples are:

come to a conclusion	for end
have the result of	for cause
reach the decision that	for decide
have a tendency	for tend
be of the opinion that	for think
come in contact with	for touch
take into account for	for consider

6. Striving to bring an essay up to an assigned word count often leads to another wordiness problem, the use of filler, or empty padding. Most instructors would rather receive a short essay than wade through filler.

These styrofoam-like phrases add no meaning but take up space:

In our present modern world
At this point in time
In a very real sense
All things considered
The reason being that
Because of the fact that
As a matter of fact
To all intents and purposes
Type of
Aspect of

Wordy: Because of the fact that a shingle type of roof tends to wear out faster, we should make the decision to switch to tiles.
Revised: Because shingle roofs wear out faster, we should switch to tiles.

7. Finally, writers sometimes inadvertently say things twice. Both words in these phrases mean the same thing: **character trait**, **consensus of opinion**, **contributing factor**. Many clichés or readymade phrases are dull because they are both unoriginal and repetitive: **no way, shape, or form** and **brief, concise, and to the point**.