

## WRITING CONCISE SENTENCES

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

— William Strunk Jr.  
in *Elements of Style*

Whether it's a two-word quip or a 200-word bear, a sentence must be a lean, thinking machine. Here are some notes toward efficiency and conciseness in writing.

### **PRUNING THE REDUNDANT**

Avoid saying the same thing twice.

Example:

Many uneducated citizens ~~who have never attended school~~ continue to vote for better schools.

A phrase that repeats itself—like "true fact," "twelve noon," "I saw it with my own eyes"—is sometimes called a **pleonasm**.

Redundant phrases are bad habits just waiting to take control of your writing. Beware of the following.

Redundancy	The Lean Version
12 midnight	midnight
12 noon	noon
4 a.m. in the morning	4 a.m.
absolutely spectacular/phenomenal	spectacular/phenomenal
a person who is nice	a nice person
a total of 10 books	10 books
biography of her life	biography
circle around	circle
close proximity	proximity
completely unanimous	unanimous

Compiled and edited by SIUC Writing Center - [write.siuc.edu](http://write.siuc.edu).

Taken from <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm>

consensus of opinion	consensus
cooperate together	cooperate
each and every	each
enclosed herewith	enclosed
end result	result
exactly the same	the same
final completion	completion
frank and honest exchange	frank exchange or honest exchange
free gift	gift
he/she is a person who . . .	he/she
important/basic essentials	essentials
in spite of the fact that	although
in the field of economics/law enforcement	in economics/law enforcement
in the event that	if
job functions	job or functions
new innovations	innovations
one and the same	the same
particular interest	interest
period of four days	four days
personally, I think/feel	I think/feel
personal opinion	opinion
puzzling in nature	puzzling
refer back	refer
repeat again	repeat
return again	return
revert back	revert
shorter/longer in length	shorter/longer
small/large in size	small/large

*Compiled and edited by SIUC Writing Center - write.siuc.edu.*

*Taken from <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm>*

square/round/rectangular in shape	square/round/rectangular
summarize briefly	summarize
surrounded on all sides	surrounded
surrounding circumstances	circumstances
the future to come	the future
there is no doubt but that	no doubt
usual/habitual custom	custom
we are in receipt of	we have received

## Abbreviated Redundancies



A special breed of redundancy is proliferating in our modern world as we increasingly rely on abbreviations and acronyms in the busyness of our technology. Some people insist it is redundant to say "ATM machine" because ATM means Automated Teller Machine. They add that it is redundant to say "HIV virus" because HIV means Human Immunodeficiency Virus, "AIDS syndrome" because AIDS means Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome, "CPU unit" because CPU means Central Processing Unit. It sounds particularly silly when we come up with a plural such as "CPU units" — Central Processing Unit units. It is perhaps too easy to get caught up in this, however. "CD disk" can be redundant, but nowadays the abbreviation CD can refer to a number of things, including the machine itself. Occasionally, an abbreviation — like CD, ATM — becomes more of an idea unto itself than a shortened version for a set of words, and the abbreviation ought to be allowed to act as modifier.

## Reducing Clauses to Phrases, Phrases to Single Words

Be alert for clauses or phrases that can be pared to simpler, shorter constructions. The "which clause" can often be shortened to a simple adjective. (Be careful, however, not to lose some needed emphasis by over-pruning; the word "which," which is sometimes necessary [as it is in this sentence], is not *evil*.)

Example:

Smith College, which was founded in 1871, is the premier all-women's college in the United States.

Rewritten: Founded in 1871, Smith College is the premier all-women's college in the United States.

Citizens who knew what was going on voted him out of office.

Compiled and edited by SIUC Writing Center - [write.siuc.edu](http://write.siuc.edu).

Taken from <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm>

Rewritten: Knowledgeable citizens voted him out of office.

Recommending that a student copy from another student's paper is not something he would recommend.

Rewritten: He wouldn't recommend that a student copy from another student's paper. (Or "He would never tell a student to copy . . . .")

Phrases, too, can sometimes be trimmed, sometimes to a single word.

Example:

Unencumbered by a sense of responsibility, Jason left his wife with forty-nine kids and a can of beans.

Rewritten: Jason irresponsibly left his wife with forty-nine kids and a can of beans. (Or leave out the word altogether and let the act speak for itself.)

### **Intensifiers that Don't Intensify**

Avoid using words such as *really*, *very*, *quite*, *extremely*, *severely* when they are not necessary. It is probably enough to say that the salary increase is *inadequate*. Does saying that it is *severely* inadequate introduce anything more than a tone of hysteria? These words shouldn't be banished from your vocabulary, but they will be used to best effect when used sparingly.

### **Avoiding Expletive Constructions**

This sounds like something a politician has to learn to avoid, but, no, an *expletive construction* is a common device that often robs a sentence of energy before it gets a chance to do its work. Expletive constructions begin with *there is/are* or *it is*.

Example:

There are twenty-five students who have already expressed a desire to attend the program next summer. It is they and their parents who stand to gain the most by the government grant.

Rewritten: Twenty-five students have already expressed a desire to attend the program next summer. They and their parents stand to gain the most by the government grant.

### **Phrases You Can Omit**

Be on the lookout for important sounding phrases that add nothing to the meaning of a sentence. Such phrases quickly put a reader on guard that the writer is trading in puffery; worse, they put a reader to sleep.

all things considered	All things considered, Connecticut's woodlands are in better shape now than ever before.
-----------------------	--

	<del>All things considered,</del> Connecticut's woodlands are in better shape now than ever before.
as a matter of fact	As a matter of fact, there are more woodlands in Connecticut now than there were in 1898. <del>as a matter of fact,</del> There are more woodlands in Connecticut now than there were in 1898.
as far as I'm concerned	As far as I'm concerned, there is no need for further protection of woodlands. <del>As far as I'm concerned, there</del> Further protection of woodlands is not needed.
at the present time	This is because there are fewer farmers at the present time. <del>This is because there are fewer farmers now.</del>
because of the fact that	Woodlands have grown in area because of the fact that farmers have abandoned their fields. <del>Woodlands have grown in area because farmers have abandoned their fields.</del>
by means of	Major forest areas are coming back by means of natural processes. <del>Major forest areas are coming back through natural processes. (or naturally)</del>
by virtue of the fact that	Our woodlands are coming back by virtue of the fact that our economy has shifted its emphasis. <del>Our woodlands are coming back by virtue of the fact that</del> because our economy has shifted its emphasis.
due to the fact that	Due to the fact that their habitats are being restored, forest creatures are also re-establishing their population bases. <del>Due to the fact that</del> Because their habitats are being restored, forest creatures are also re-establishing their population bases.
exists	The fear that exists among many people that we are losing our woodlands is uncalled for. <del>The fear that exists among many people that we are losing our woodlands is uncalled for.</del>
for all intents and purposes	The era in which we must aggressively defend our woodlands has, for all intents and purposes, passed. <del>The era in which we must aggressively defend our woodlands has, for all intents and purposes, passed.</del>
for the most part	For the most part, people's suspicions are based on a

Compiled and edited by SIUC Writing Center - [write.siuc.edu](http://write.siuc.edu).

Taken from <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm>

	<p>misunderstanding of the facts.</p> <p><del>For the most part, p</del>People's suspicions are based on a misunderstanding of the facts.</p>
for the purpose of	<p>Many woodlands, in fact, have been purchased for the purpose of creating public parks.</p> <p><del>Many woodlands, in fact, have been purchased for the purpose of creating</del> as public parks.</p>
have a tendency to	<p>This policy has a tendency to isolate some communities.</p> <p><del>This policy has a tendency</del> tends to isolate some communities.</p>
in a manner of speaking	<p>The policy has, in a manner of speaking, begun to Balkanize the more rural parts of our state.</p> <p><del>The policy has, in a manner of speaking,</del> begun to Balkanize the more rural parts of our state.</p>
in a very real sense	<p>In a very real sense, this policy works to the detriment of those it is supposed to help.</p> <p><del>In a very real sense, this</del> This policy works to the detriment of those it is supposed to help.</p>
in my opinion	<p>In my opinion, this wasteful policy ought to be revoked.</p> <p><del>In my opinion, this</del> This wasteful policy ought to be revoked.</p>
in the case of	<p>In the case of this particular policy, citizens of northeast Connecticut became very upset.</p> <p><del>Citizens of northeast Connecticut became very upset</del> about his policy.</p>
in the final analysis	<p>In the final analysis, the state would have been better off without such a policy.</p> <p><del>In the final analysis, the</del> The state would have been better off without such a policy.</p>
in the event that	<p>In the event that enough people protest, it will probably be revoked.</p> <p><del>If enough people protest,</del> it will probably be revoked.</p>
in the nature of	<p>Something in the nature of a repeal may soon take place.</p> <p><del>Something in the nature of</del> like a repeal may soon take place.</p>
in the process of	<p>Legislators are already in the process of reviewing the statutes.</p>

Compiled and edited by SIUC Writing Center - [write.siuc.edu](http://write.siuc.edu).

Taken from <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm>

	Legislators are already <del>in the process of</del> reviewing the statutes.
it seems that	It seems that they can't wait to get rid of this one. <del>It seems that they</del> They can't wait to get rid of this one.
manner	They have monitored the activities of conservationists in a cautious manner. They have cautiously monitored the activities of conservationists.
the point I am trying to make	The point I am trying to make is that sometimes public policy doesn't accomplish what it set out to achieve. <del>The point I am trying to make is that some</del> Sometimes public policy doesn't accomplish what it set out to achieve.
type of	Legislators need to be more careful of the type of policy they propose. Legislators need to be more careful of the <del>type of</del> policy they propose.
what I mean to say is	What I mean to say is that well intentioned lawmakers sometimes make fools of themselves. <del>What I mean to say is that well</del> Well intentioned lawmakers sometimes make fools of themselves.

## EXERCISES

**Directions: Rewrite the following sentences in the text-areas provided. There is, however, no single right answer to these rewrites.**

1. At this point in time we can't ascertain the reason as to why the screen door was left open.
2. My sister, who is employed as a nutritionist at the University of Michigan, recommends the daily intake of megadoses of Vitamin C.
3. Basically, in light of the fact that Congressman Fuenches was totally exhausted by his last campaign, there was an expectation on the part of the voters that he would not reduplicate his effort to achieve office in government again.
4. It is to be hoped that we discover a means to create an absolutely proper and fitting tribute to Professor Espinoza.
5. There is a desire on the part of many of us to maintain a spring recess for the purpose of getting away from the demands of our studies.
6. The nursery school teacher education training sessions involve active interfacing with preschool children of the appropriate age as well as intensive peer interaction in the form of role playing
7. At what point in time will a downturn in the stock market have a really serious effect on the social life of people as a whole?
8. I would call your attention to the fact that our President, who was formerly the Governor of Arkansas, is basically a Southerner.
9. There are millions of fans who desperately want the Hartford Whalers to stay in the city.
10. Bothered by allergies, a condition that made them sneeze, some of the preschool children had sinus troubles that caused them to miss several days in nursery school this spring.

**Directions: Eliminate redundant statements and useless phrases from the sentence. There is certainly more than one way to repair a wordy sentence.**

1. He found his neighbor who lived next door to be attractive in appearance.
2. He was really late to his English class due to the fact that he had to finish his math test.
3. Although they were several in number, the street gang feared the police.
4. Bob provided an explanation of the computer to his grandmother.
5. During the time when I lived in South Carolina, it was my intention to go to college in Florida.
6. In order to prove that he could hold his own on the track team, Gordo had to train hard like the old runners.
7. If you go to the store, you will see that the store is closed on Sundays because the storeowner likes to go to church.
8. Due to the fact that Jim liked chocolate, he was very upset when the candy company canceled production of his favorite chocolate bar.
9. One time when I went to the park, my friend, whose name is Jake, went with me and we had fun due to the fact that it was a nice day out.
10. In this report I will conduct a study of ants and the setup of their colonies.