

## Writing Concisely

To write well takes practice. While writing extensively about a topic may be fun, what you are used to, or what you’re doing to reach the word/page count minimum, you want to make sure that your writing actually fits the assigned topic. The difficult task becomes writing a draft that fits the requirements provided in the assignment, but also remains effective and detailed.

For college writing,

- Write what you mean, mean what you write—precisely and carefully.
- Respect your writing enough to refrain from overstatement.
- Study drafts to identify what can be deleted without losing meaning.
- Read your writing aloud, listening for errors.
- Use concrete, specific examples. Cut out extra words, empty phrases, weak descriptors, negative constructions, and unnecessary “to be” verbs.

Below is a list of tendencies which you should limit or correct in your writing.

### Redundancy

Often writers repeat the same phrases, trying to express themselves clearly. Here is a selection of over-used phrases:

in a years’ time	the reason being
whether or not	currently being done
past experience	the mark, the level
estimated about	very unique
the old adage	I think to myself
laptop computer	first and foremost

### Needless Repetition

Be wary of repeating yourself. In choosing adverbs or adjectives which describe, you might go overboard. Consider the following sentence:

- a. The vintage antiques from yesteryear were on sale at the airy, sprawling retail shop.

[vintage means ‘antique’]      [yesteryear means ‘the past’]

- b. The quaint antique teacups were on sale at the shop on the corner.  
 [quaint means old fashioned]

### Empty words

Empty words (and phrases) are known as filler. This category includes “as a matter of fact,” and “because of the fact that.”

Example: When all is said and done, Henry's Puffy Tacos sells a lot of puffy tacos; I am not sure you would want to try anything else.

Use instead: You should try the signature dish at Henry's Puffy Tacos.

### Vagueness

Try not to use words that are vague (ambiguous, imprecise, unclear). Avoid words such as “like, that, these, those, thing, it, stuff.”

Ask yourself, what is “it”/ “that,” and choose a precise word which describes exactly what you refer to.

Example: Take the dog **there**. (Where is there? There could be any place. Perhaps the dog needs a bath and you mean to say, “Take the dog to the backyard.” “There” could be as close as the kitchen or as far away as the pet shop across town.)

Use instead: Take the dog to the **backyard**.

### Jargon

Use of words specific to a certain field of study or profession such as medical, legal, or technological terms is known as jargon. Gaining knowledge of these words would require dictionary work. If your topic absolutely requires you to use some jargon (or your professor asks you to use jargon), you should provide a definition of such words within your sentence.

Examples:

The patient suddenly went **bradycardic**. (Meaning their heartbeats slowed down)

*Hamlet* gives its audience plenty of **foreshadowing**. (clues to see what comes next)

How might you replace the word or phrase below to avoid jargon in your writing?

AWOL    due diligence    hard copy    cache    stat    holistic    best practice

### Euphemisms

Are phrases which state their message in an indirect way, most used for unpleasant or embarrassing topics, such as death and crimes. An example is “He needs some peace and quiet.” This means to say you need to go away and leave him alone, without clearly saying it.

Examples:

The groom has **cold feet**. [means he has doubts about getting married]

How might you choose more precise language to express the following euphemisms?  
between jobs   on the streets   doesn't suffer fools   friendly fire   passed away   not up to scratch

### Final tips

Avoid words that may be slang, sexist, or invented language. You can always look up a word in the dictionary to find out if it is part of the English language.

Remember that spelling some words in text messages or social media do not reflect dictionary spellings. For example, using lol, cuz, u instead of you, ASAP, c instead of "see", and IDK are examples of textspeak and not standard edited English.

Using contractions such as didn't, couldn't, isn't, and can't, may not be acceptable in a formal essay. Spell out the word: did not, could not, cannot. Be sure to review your assignment details carefully.

For more information on Writing Concisely, refer to the following:

Paramedic Editing Method   [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue\\_owl.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html)

Words and Phrases to Avoid   <https://www.scribbr.com/academic-writing/taboo-words/>

Strunk and White, Elementary Principles of Composition

<https://www.bartleby.com/141/strunk5.html>