

## TIPS FOR WRITING CONCISELY

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You've been assigned an academic paper and need to fill up 15 pages. Repetition and wordiness will take up space, but will also lose you marks. On the other hand, you may have become so caught up in the topic that you've written 10 pages over the limit...

Learning to express yourself concisely is not only good for improving your writing style, but also for discerning how well you yourself understand a particular idea or concept. The tips listed here are aimed at helping you to become a more concise writer. But, don't worry: it's not all about reducing your word count! It's primarily about learning how to use words and phrases that describe what you want to say most effectively.

### ■ Components of writing concisely

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There are a few major components to writing clearly and concisely:

- ▶ choose your words carefully
- ▶ construct your sentences thoughtfully
- ▶ use grammar correctly

### ■ Using meaningful words over vague counterparts

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Occasionally, you may find yourself describing a concept using a number of small, vague words when one or two will do. This can lead to wordiness, which more often than not makes the point you're trying to state unclear and hard to follow. A great place to start when searching for more meaningful vocabulary is a thesaurus (and many can be found online). However, if you find a new word, be sure to look up what its precise meaning is first by checking in a dictionary: synonyms have *similar* meanings, but not usually *exactly the same* meaning.

### ■ Combining sentences

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You can get rid of words by reading through your work and combining sentences. The main meaning of one sentence could be implanted into another sentence, thereby retaining the essence without the excess words.

### ■ Get rid of clichés and euphemisms

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Clichés and euphemisms are phrases that have been overused to the point that they've lost their meaning. **Clichés** includes phrases such as "to make a long story short" or "ripe old age". **Euphemisms** are words or phrases that substitute language that might come across as offensive or blunt, for instance, instead of stating someone died, you can say they "passed away" or they've "gone to sleep". Delete any you find in your writing, opting instead for more concise ways of making your point. This issue is also dealt with in "**Academic writing style tips**" in this series.

## ■ Look out for deadweight words

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If a word is adding nothing to a sentence, get rid of it. There are a number of ways you can achieve this, including eliminating:

- ▶ details and information that you feel would be obvious to your reader
- ▶ words that don't add anything to the meaning of your sentences, e.g., "particular", "actually", "basically", "really"
- ▶ words that have the same meaning
- ▶ pairs of words that indicate each other, e.g., "end result", "past history", "true fact"
- ▶ words that signify the category being discussed, e.g., "agricultural field", "period in time", "in a confused state"

## ■ Additional ways to avoid wordiness

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- ▶ Avoid **formulaic phrases**. Instead, use single word versions. For example, instead of "with regard to" use "about", or instead of "due to the fact" use "because".
- ▶ Avoid **padded verbs**, and, again use single word versions instead. For instance, instead of "to have an expectation" write "to expect", or instead of "to make an inquiry" write "to inquire".
- ▶ Get rid of needless **"to be"**s. For example, in the sentence "Democracy is consider *to be* the best governance system" the "to be" can be omitted: "Democracy is considered the best governance system".
- ▶ Similarly, get rid of useless **relative structures**, i.e., "that", "which" and "who". For instance, in the sentence "In the book, *which is* entitled..." "which is" and even "which is entitled" can be omitted: "In the book..."