In both academic and business writing, conciseness is important. Concise writing expresses ideas without unnecessary wordiness. Wordiness not only increases the length of your work without adding meaning, but also makes your writing harder to understand.

When you write the first draft of a paper, it is probably wordy. This is a natural result of trying to get your ideas down clearly on paper, and it happens to even very experienced writers. When you are drafting a paper, you shouldn't worry about wordiness. Instead, you should solve wordiness problems later at the editing stage of the writing process.

This handout shows you how to recognize wordiness and how to revise your writing to be more concise.

**Wordiness and How to Correct It**

The following sentence is wordy. What words could you take away without losing any of the meaning of the sentence?

*The reason why he came to Douglas College was because it was inexpensive in price.*

The words *reason, why, and because* all express the same idea.

Saying something is *inexpensive* includes the idea of *price*.

A more concise version of the sentence might be:

*He came to Douglas College because it was inexpensive.*
Here’s another example of wordiness:

*Despite the fact that she was feeling ill, she came to the conclusion that she would go to work.*

*Despite the fact that* is really just a long way of saying *despite.*

*Came to the conclusion that* is a long way of saying *decided.*

A more concise version of the sentence is:

*Despite feeling ill, she decided to go to work.*

Now, compare the following pair of sentences. Why can the extra words in the first sentence be left out?

*In my opinion, I think the study of Sociology is very fascinating.*

*Sociology is fascinating.*

*In my opinion and I think* just repeat the same idea, so we could take one out. However, *fascinating* is clearly a judgement, so there is no need to include either *I think* or *In my opinion.*

*Sociology* includes the idea of studying it, so *the study of* is redundant. *Redundant* is a word writing teachers use to describe unnecessary repetition.

*Fascinating* can be defined as very interesting, so adding *very* is unnecessary.

Concise writing avoids wordiness and redundancy; it is clearer and more interesting for a reader. Work through the exercises in this handout and discuss your answers with your tutor.
Avoiding Wordiness

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Exercise 1: Omitting unnecessary words

Cross out the unnecessary words in the following sentences.

Example:

*The children were tired and exhausted after the long climb to the high top of the mountain.*

1. The stegosaurus was huge in size.
2. Now she is at school.
3. He was happy and joyful about the great gift.
4. Because of the fact that he got a good grade on the midterm, he decided to take the night off.
5. In the summer season, many Vancouverites like to picnic in Stanley Park.
6. On January 14, in the middle of winter, the weather was freezing cold.
7. I think smoking in public places should be banned.
8. In order to get the true facts of the case, the lawyer interviewed 4 witnesses.
9. Furthermore, Henry VIII also married six different women.
10. Redundancy is defined as unnecessary repetition.
11. New Westminster, which was British Columbia’s first capital city, is located on the shores of the Fraser River.
12. The computer is sitting on top of the table.
Causes of Wordiness

Besides redundancy, there are some common issues causing wordiness. If you watch for these issues, you can recognize wordiness more easily. Compare the wordy (W) examples below to the more concise (C) examples. Discuss the differences with your tutor. Don't let the grammatical terminology throw you. What's important is to see the differences between the wordy and concise examples.

Use of vague words which need explanation instead of precise words

W: She talked to him in a loud angry voice.
C: She yelled at him.

W: The crime wave had some bad results that cost people a lot of money.
C: The crime wave had some costly results.

Use of long expressions instead of individual words

W: to come to the conclusion that
C: to decide

W: to put forward the idea that
C: to suggest

Under-use of listing

W: She went to the store and bought a loaf of bread. She also picked up some milk. She also got a newspaper.
C: She bought a loaf of bread, some milk and a newspaper at the store.

W: In the experiment, he poured water in a beaker. Then he boiled the water for 5 minutes. Then he measured the water that was left.
C: In the experiment, he poured water in a beaker, boiled the water for 5 minutes, and measured the water that was left.

If you have problems listing correctly, see the Learning Centre handout titled “Parallelism”.

Over-use of passive verbs

W: The criminal was caught by the police, and later the criminal was convicted by the courts.
C: The police caught the criminal and the court convicted him.