

TECHNICAL WRITING: WHAT TO AVOID

While writing your technical paper, try to avoid using words or phrases that “bloat” your paper. It is better to state your point in the clearest and simplest way. “Filler” words will only complicate your writing. Below are some words you should always try to avoid using.

Avoid Expletives: *Expletives* are words that serve a grammatical function in a sentence but have no meaning. The most common expletives are *it is*, *there is*, *there are*, and related phrases.

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| Weak: | <i>There is</i> no alternative for us except to withdraw the product. |
| Strong: | We have no alternative except to withdraw the product. |
| Weak: | <i>It is</i> hoped that testing the evaluation copies will help us make a decision. |
| Strong: | We hope that testing the evaluation copies will help us make a decision. |

Avoid Nominalized Verbs: *Nominalized* verbs are verbs that have been changed into nouns then coupled with weaker verbs.

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| Weak: | Each <i>preparation</i> of the solution is done twice. |
| Strong: | Each solution is prepared twice. |
| Weak: | <i>Consideration</i> should be given to an <i>acquisition</i> of the properties. |
| Strong: | We should consider acquiring the properties. |

Avoid Fillers: In our writing, we sometimes use fillers, many of which are more suited to speech. Most of these fillers are meaningless in writing. Some examples of fillers are *basically*, *kind of*, *certain*, *rather*, *essentially*, *sort of*. These words simply “bloat” your paper.

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| Bloated: | <i>I think that, basically</i> , the board felt <i>sort of</i> betrayed, <i>in a sense</i> , by the <i>kind of</i> behavior the president displayed. |
| Better: | The board felt betrayed by the president’s behavior. |

Other fillers include redundant expressions, such as *collaborate together*, *past history*, *end result*, *any and all*, *still remain*, *completely eliminate*, *very unique*. Say what you mean once.

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| Redundant: | This project would not have succeeded if not for the <i>hard work and considerable effort</i> of <i>each and every one</i> of the auditors. |
| Better: | This project would not have succeeded if not for the <i>hard work</i> of <i>every one</i> of the auditors. |

Avoid Unnecessary Prepositional Phrases: A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition followed by a noun or a noun equivalent, such as *in the summary*, *on the engine*, *under the heading*. Unnecessary prepositional phrases, often used with abstract nouns and nominalizations, can make your writing long and boring.

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| Long: | The increase <i>in</i> the number <i>of</i> students enrolled <i>in</i> the materials-engineering program <i>at</i> Lehigh University is suggestive <i>of</i> the regard <i>in</i> which that program is held <i>by</i> the university’s new students. |
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Shorter: The growth of Lehigh University's materials-engineering program suggests that the university's new students consider it a good program.

Avoid Wordy Phrases: Wordy phrases also make writing long and boring. For example, many people write *on a daily basis* instead of *daily*. The longer sentence may sound more important, but *daily* says the same thing more concisely.

Wordy: I am of the opinion that, in regard to profit achievement, the statistics pertaining to this month will appear to indicate an upward tendency.

Concise: I think that this month's statistics will show an increase in profits.

Below is a table of common wordy phrases and their more concise equivalents:

Wordy Phrase	Concise Phrase	Wordy Phrase	Concise Phrase
a majority of	most	in the event of	if
a number of	some, many	in view of the fact that	because
at an early date	soon	it is often the case that	often
at the conclusion of	after, following	it is our opinion that	we think that
at the present time	now	it is our recommendation that	we recommend that
at this point in time	now	it is our understanding that	we understand that
based on the fact that	because	make reference to	refer to
check out	check	of the opinion that	think that
despite the fact that	although	on a daily basis	daily
due to the fact that	because	on the grounds that	because
during the course of	during	prior to	before
during the time that	during, while	relative to	regarding, about
have the capability to	can	so as to	to
in connection with	about	subsequent to	after
in order to	to	take into consideration	consider
in regard to	regarding, about	until such time as	until

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