



A Guide to Writing Concisely

There are three steps you need to take as you edit your writing to make it more concise. They are:

1. Cut out (repetitive) language
2. Remove unnecessary summary
3. Exclude circular reasoning

Step 1: *Cut Out (Repetitive) Language*

- Look for places you use the same words in close proximity.
- Read your paper out loud to see if you're relying too much on one verb or verb type.
 - Often, we tend to go to “be” verbs—is, am, was, were, are, etc.
 - Instead of:
 - The author was arguing this point throughout the text.
 - Try:
 - The author argued this point throughout the text.
- Keep an eye on whether or not you tend to start your paragraphs, introduce your quotations, or open your conclusions in the same way. ○ Remove phrasing like
 - “in conclusion”—a good conclusion means we won't need this language
 - “this paper will prove”—we'll read it and find out for ourselves; only use this language if your professor has specifically requested it.
 - “the author says”—because often the author doesn't even *say* anything (but rather writes it).
 - You can use their name or another verb for variety.

Step 2: *Remove Unnecessary Summary*

- Unless you are writing a summary paper, do not give too much summary of a text without analyzing why that information is useful to consider.
 - Even if you are summarizing, make sure you explain connections about what is important.
- Give your audience enough information to find the resource and read it for themselves.
 - This spot is one where citations become so important so your readers can find the materials easily.
 - Make sure that your readers will want to do this work by analyzing why the resource is a useful one for them to read.

- Don't give so much detail that your audience grows bored or unwilling to make connections between your perspective and that of the author/ researcher/ writer who you're examining.

Instead of:	Try:	Why:
The author was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1955 but is of Indian descent. He moved to America due to the civil unrest in Ethiopia.	This multicultural author was born in Ethiopia. He and his family left for America due to the civil unrest when he was still young.	Details about the author's personal background can leave readers biased, unfortunately. Only write relevant details. Many disciplines don't even want to know the gender of the authors about whom you're writing.
Now, he lives in America and practices medicine there. But he took a break from practicing medicine in 1991 to become a writer. Now, he practices medicine and writes, too.	While the author began his career as a medical practitioner, he took a break to become a writer. Now, he does both! (For more on Abraham Verghese, the author on whom this example is based, look here: https://profiles.stanford.edu/abraham-verghese)	Years can be distracting and also lead to issues with ageism when related to someone's lifespan. Only focus on them if there were relevant occurrences in these years. Repetitive language has also been removed. Note that two sentences started with "now" previously.

Step 3: Exclude Circular Reasoning

- Circular reasoning occurs when you use your summary as your analysis or your argument as your evidence.
 - For example: COVID-19 is risky because it is dangerous.
 - You're essentially making the same point twice—COVID-19 puts populations at risk.
- Circular reasoning is problematic because it looks like you don't have the ability to analyze the information and so you settle for just repeating it.
 - If you can't figure out why a piece of information is important enough to include in your paper it means one of two things:
 - 1) If you have time, do more research about its importance.
 - 2) If you don't have time, find a different piece of information to include.

Practice Examples: Make the writing on the left more concise using the space provided in the column on the right. The first example is done for you.

Less Concise:	More Concise:
1) The author, married to Joan Barlow with two sons, writes about the need for empathy in medical practice.	1) The author writes about the necessity of empathy.
2) This paper will prove how surgeon David Watts is an empathetic caregiver with empathy as a core component of his practice.	
3) Watts writes about his experiences in healthcare, sharing how experienced healthcare differently than others.	
4) It's important to provide healthcare because healthcare is important.	
5) In conclusion, we should all take care to offer more care while we can.	

The author mentioned above is [David Watts](#). The article "Cure for the Common Cold" can be found in NEJM Vol 367, Issue 13. This article is available through Ames Library at Illinois Wesleyan.