

# OWLS Writing Guides: Concision & Paramedic Sentence Revision



## ELIMINATE WORDINESS AND MAKE YOUR WRITING CONCISE AND DIRECT

### 1. Eliminate redundant words and useless intensifiers:

~~completely~~-finished                      ~~very~~ quickly  
~~past~~-experience                         ~~perfectly~~ clear

I want to ~~entirely~~-eliminate redundancy in my writing.

### 2. Eliminate filler phrases:

Phrase whose idea can be expressed in a single word:

due to the fact that (because)	in the near future (soon)
for the purpose of (for)	in a situation in which (when)
on a daily basis (daily)	at this point in time (now)

Unnecessary phrase:

~~The point I wish to make is that~~ wordy writing is unclear writing.

### 3. Avoid expletive constructions when you can (*There is, There are, It is*):

*There are* several ways to eliminate wordiness in your writing.  
You can eliminate wordiness in your writing in several ways.

*It is* the policy of this course that students attend class.  
Course policy requires that students attend class.

### 4. Avoid passive voice constructions (subject receives action rather than performs action in the sentence):

The car's battery *was replaced by* the mechanic.  
The mechanic *replaced* the car's battery.

### 5. Replace a verb phrase with a simple past or present tense verb when appropriate:

She *is hoping* to do better on the next test.  
She *hopes* to do better on the next test.

### 6. Combine key ideas of two sentences into one sentence, eliminating repeated words.

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## THE PARAMEDIC METHOD OF REVISION

Almost all of the wordy constructions described can be addressed by applying a method of sentence revision called the Paramedic Method. This method flags certain words, alerting you to sentences that may be revised to be more concise and direct. To apply the paramedic method, follow these steps:

**1. Circle all prepositions, especially the common prepositions *of, in, on, at, by, about, for, and to.***

Prepositions signal prepositional phrases, which can create unnecessary wordiness. Don't use a phrase when a single word will do. You don't have to eliminate all prepositions, just those that cause clutter.

on a daily basis → daily  
at this point in time → now  
for the purpose of → for

**2. Circle "to be" verbs (*am/is/are/was/were/be/been/being*).**

"Be" verbs describe the state of being of people or things in a sentence and are often necessary, either as linking verbs or helping verbs (*He is my friend. He is going to be late*). But "be" verbs also signal passive voice sentences that may be revised into more direct active voice sentences. Replace as many "be" verbs with action verbs as you can, changing passive voice to active voice.

The castle is defended by the soldiers. → The soldiers defend the castle.

**3. To change from passive to active voice, ask "What is the action?" and "Who or what is performing the action?" Express that action using an active verb, and make the doer of that action into the subject of the sentence.**

[receiver]      [action]      [doer]      →      [doer]      [action]      [receiver]  
Bill              was kicked by      Jim.      →      Jim      kicked      Bill.

Avoid unnecessary compounding of verbs: Jim *proceeded to kick* Bill. → Jim *kicked* Bill.

**4. Eliminate unnecessary openers and filler phrases.**

*The fact of the matter is, Due to the fact that, The point I wish to make is, For all intents and purposes*

**5. Omit redundancies, useless intensifiers, and other unnecessary words.**

*Completely finished = finished              Past experience = experience*  
*Perfectly clear = clear                              Very quickly = quickly*

**EXAMPLE:**

Wordy: A tone of anger is used by the writer in an effort to help readers with understanding the depth of her feelings on the issue at hand.

Concise: The writer's angry tone conveyed her deep feelings.