

WORDINESS

“Read over your compositions, and, when you meet a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out.” Samuel Johnson

The grammar outlaw: Wordiness

The grammar crime: Wordy sentences use too many useless words that clutter writing. Good writing is simple and direct; it uses the simplest word possible that conveys the same meaning. Wordiness takes away from this clarity.

Question: How do we know we have a wordy sentence?

| Outlaw | Rehabilitated |
|---|--|
| For all intents and purposes, the reason Mr. Henderson arrived late for work was due to the fact that he stopped at very many traffic lights that were red in colour. | Mr. Henderson arrived late for work because he stopped at many red lights. |
| 31 words | 13 words |

The original sentence is wordy because we can express this thought using fewer words.

We can cut eighteen words. The rehabilitated sentence is also easier to read.

Question: How did we reduce the wordiness in the example?

- If you want to know the trick, read the step-by-step rehabilitation.

Question: How do we catch wordy sentences?

- Not all sentences will be as wordy as the example; however, you should always watch for unnecessary words.
- Try removing words from each sentence. If you can remove a word while keeping the sentence's meaning, the sentence is wordy.

Keep a word if

- it is necessary to the grammar of the sentence
- it is a key idea, fact, feeling, or description

Five Examples of Wordiness.

1. Eliminate redundancy.

| redundant | rehabilitated |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| each separate incident | each incident |
| many different ways | many ways |
| dash quickly | dash |
| as to whether | whether |
| tall skyscraper | tall |
| blue in colour | blue |
| free gift | gift |
| advance notice | notice |
| he is a man who is | he is |
| appear to be | appear |
| completely finished | finished |
| the reason . . . is because | because |

2. Delete empty words and phrases

| | | |
|-------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| generally | tend to | really |
| apparently | in my opinion | very |
| basically | I think that | various |
| essentially | I feel | in some ways |
| virtually | I believe | for all intents and purposes |

3. Avoid expressions that can be more clearly said in another way

| outlaw | rehabilitated |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| at this point in time | at this time/now |
| in the neighbourhood of | of about |
| had an effect upon | influenced |
| due to the fact that | because |
| in order to | to |
| • for the purpose of | • for |
| it is important that | must |
| until such time as | until |
| at the same time as | while |
| with the possible exception of | except |

4. Delete the following phrases and variations:

- there is . . . that
- it is . . . that

| Outlaw | Rehabilitated |
|---|-----------------------------|
| There are many students who like reading. | Many students like reading. |
| It is the desk that is uncomfortable. | The desk is uncomfortable. |

5. Avoid using the passive voice

- The passive voice often uses more words than the active voice. For more information, see the passive voice grammar outlaw.

6. Substitute verbs with prepositions with verbs not needing prepositions.

- eg. Never write “find out” when you can write “discover.”