# WORDINESS: DANGER SIGNALS *and Ways to React*

One of the most efficient ways to improve your writing is to edit it for conciseness. You may have been struggling to think ideas through as you wrote—and piled up alternative wordings. Or you may have fallen into the habit of using more words than necessary just to use up space. If you can let your original draft "cool down" a while, you will find it easer to recognize unnecessary words and edit them out. Your reader will thank you! Here are some common patterns of wordiness, with sensible things to do about them.

## Doubling of Words (INSTEAD, *choose one*):

| | |
|---|---|
| e.g., mutual agreement *(agreement)* | future prospects *(prospects)* |
| consensus of opinion *(consensus)* | reconsider again *(reconsider)* |
| whether or not *(whether)* | inadvertent error *(error)* |

## Intensifiers, Qualifiers (INSTEAD, *omit* or *give specific details*):

| | |
|---|---|
| e.g., very | really |
| extremely | definitely |
| a considerable amount of | to a certain extent |

## Formulaic Phrases (INSTEAD, *use a one-word form* or *omit*):

| | |
|---|---|
| e.g., for the purpose of *(to)* | due to the fact that *(because)* |
| at this point in time *(now)* | in the near future *(soon)* |
| with regard to *(about)* | in view of the fact that *(because)* |
| as the case may be *(---)* | Basically, . . . *(---)* |

## Catch-all Terms (INSTEAD, *omit wherever possible*):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| e.g., aspect | field | quality |
| case | kind | situation |
| fact | matter | sort |
| factor | nature | thing |
| feature | problem | type |

WEAK        A surprising **aspect** of most labour negotiations is their friendly **quality**.
IMPROVED   Most labour negotiations are surprisingly friendly.

WEAK        The **fact** of the war had the **effect** of causing many changes.
IMPROVED   The war caused many changes. Specifically . . .

## Padded Verbs (INSTEAD, *use a one-word form*):

e.g.        to have an expectation, hope, wish, understanding, etc.
      *(to expect, hope, wish understand, etc.)*
     to make an arrangement, plan, decision, inquiry, acquisition, etc.
      *(to arrange, plan, decide, inquire, acquire, etc.)*

## Unnecessary "to be" and "being" (INSTEAD, *omit*):

WEAK        The program is considered **to be** effective.
IMPROVED   The book is considered effective *OR* The program is effective.


WEAK        because of the terrain **being** rough
IMPROVED   because of the rough terrain



## Passive Verbs  (INSTEAD, *use active voice, preferably with a personal subject*):

WEAK        It **is felt** that an exercise program **should be attempted** by this patient before any surgery **is performed**.
IMPROVED   The patient should attempt an exercise program before surgery.
IMPROVED   I recommend that the patient attempt an exercise program before surgery.
IMPROVED   Mr. Lee, please do these exercises every day for six weeks to strengthen your leg muscles before we try any more surgery.


WEAK        The bevelling jig **is said** by most users **to be** faulty.
IMPROVED   Most users say the bevelling jig is faulty.



## Overuse of Relative Structures ("Who," "Which," "That") (INSTEAD, *omit*):

WEAK        The novel, **which is** entitled *Ulysses*, takes place . . .
IMPROVED   The novel *Ulysses* takes place . . .


WEAK        **It was** Confucius **who** said . . .
IMPROVED   Confucius said . . .


WEAK        **I think that** X is the case. . .
IMPROVED   X is the case, as this evidence shows:  . . .


WEAK        **There is a tendency** among many writers **who may be seen** to display **certain signs of lack of** confidence that their sentences **will be overloaded** with relative clauses and other words **which are** generally useless **in function.**
IMPROVED   Many hesitant writers overload their sentences with relative clauses and other useless words.