

Concision: Writing Precisely for Clarity

Basic Rules

1. Delete meaningless words (actually, kind of, really, deal with, etc.)
2. Delete doubled words (~~true and~~ accurate, ~~first and~~ foremost, ~~basic and~~ fundamental, etc.)
3. Delete what readers can infer (~~future~~ plans, ~~true~~ facts, ~~free~~ gift, ~~each~~ individual, ~~final~~ outcome, ~~red in color~~, large in size, ~~the field of~~ mathematics, etc.)
4. Replace a phrase with a word:
 - o These are rules *concerning the matter* of concision. | These are rules *for* concision
 - o *As concerns* composing texts *for collegiate courses...* | *When* writing in *college...*
 - o *Due to the fact that* wordy sentences annoy readers, you should tighten them up. | *Because* wordy sentences...
 - o *There is a need for* much more careful attention to concision among students. | Students *must* attend more...
 - o A consideration of their readers' needs should be foremost in the minds of writers as they are in the process of editing their work. | As they edit, writers should consider the needs of their readers.
5. Sometimes changing a sentences from passive to active is the key. (But do other things, too.)

Some Samples (all grammatically correct, but stylistic messes):

1. Sentences that are not concise are an annoyance to readers. When writers ~~who compose sentences~~ are stuffing extra words ~~and phrases~~ into them for no ~~real and~~ important reason, ~~creating wordy and rambling sentences~~, they are basically saying to readers, "You figure out my lazy ~~and inefficient~~ prose. I cannot be bothered to make your reading experience a better ~~one~~. I do not respect your time enough to make my writing economical so that your reading experience will be likewise economical."
 - o Rambling sentences annoy readers. When writers stuff sentences full of meaningless words, they say to readers, "You figure out my lazy prose. I cannot be bothered. I do not respect your time enough to make my writing economical."
2. Do you want ~~those people who read~~ your sentences to perceive ~~their style~~ as flabby or ~~as being very much like~~ a well-toned muscle?
 - o Do you want readers to perceive your sentences as flabby or muscular?
3. ~~It is not the case that~~ revising for ~~the goal of~~ concision means that you must then ~~end up with resulting~~ sentences that are short, ~~cut, choppy and of a staccato~~ rhythm. Most of the time ~~it is possible~~, in ~~point of~~ fact, to be concise and to be complex, graceful ~~and elegant in one's writing~~, all at the same time.
 - o Revising for concision need not result in short, staccato sentences; in fact, concision usually complements complexity and grace.

Now try these (strike through and rewrite):

1. If it is the case that you ignore the principles of, and guidelines for, concision that we are discussing today, you will invite the anger and wrath of the poor soul who is the one who will be reading the very next essay that you write.
2. Due to the fact that some writers think that the length of a sentence is an indicator of just how smart and intelligent it sounds, principles of concision can very often be ignored in favor of sentences that are long in size. Also, some writers insert additional words in sentences in a desperate ploy for the purpose of meeting a page expectation for an academic paper in a course.

(Adapted from Joseph Williams, *The Basics of Clarity and Grace*, 2nd Edition. NY: Longman, 2006)