

Trimming the Fat: The Trick to Clear Writing

“A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.”

– Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*

What is ‘trimming the fat’?

“Trimming the fat” means getting rid of words that are not needed in a piece of writing. When a piece of writing has too many words, this is called “**wordy**.”

Writing too many words might seem “smarter” or help fulfill an assignment’s word count. However, overwriting might also be an attempt to hide the fact that the writer does not know what to say. Therefore, to write a project that is clear and focused, it is necessary to revise a piece of writing and only keep the “meat” of the writing that the essay needs.

Top 5 Enemies of Concise Writing:

1. **Repetition:** Repetition bores readers and suggests that a writer is not sure of their own ideas.

Wordy: The speaker describes how his connection with nature makes him feel sad and upset and makes him see the darkness that is inside of him.

Concise: The speaker’s connection with nature makes him see his own internal darkness.

2. **Clichés:** Clichés do not belong in academic writing and reduce the formality of an essay’s tone.

Wordy: In a nutshell, a good time was had by all at the conference.

Concise: Everyone had a good time at the conference.

3. **Passive voice:** A passive voice confuses readers and reduces a writer’s clarity of expression. An active voice makes one’s writing appear stronger and more confident.

Wordy: The tests were graded by the teacher.

Concise: The teacher graded the tests.

4. **Over-qualification:** Over-qualification congests writing and overwhelms readers with redundant words.

Wordy: All things considered, online courses should be given more attention, in my opinion.

Concise: More attention should be given to online courses.

5. **Saying everything while saying nothing:** More words does not mean more marks. Every word written should serve a clear purpose; otherwise, it does not belong in the sentence. Avoid general language such as “things” and “reasons”; instead, just state what they are.

Wordy: In the contemporary era, many youngsters experience different problems in the areas of standards of beauty in social media and there are many different things and reasons that affect these sorts of problems.

Concise: Unrealistic standards of beauty found in social media affect young adults today.

Some helpful words:

Wordy	Concise
Because of the fact that / Due to the fact that	Because / Due to
In the event that	If
For the purpose of	To
In order to	To
It is necessary that (one)	(One) must
A majority of	Most
At this point in time / At the present time	Now
It is often the case that	Often
On a daily basis	Daily
Despite the fact that	Although
A number of	Some / many
Relative to	Regarding / about
Take into consideration	Consider

How to revise your writing for wordiness:

Original: The argument I wish to prove is that “trimming the fat” is the process of eliminating and getting rid of unnecessary information that is not needed in the assignment from the writing itself such as repetitive words, clichés, qualifiers, and other crucial mistakes that can make one’s writing too congested and wordy.

1. Eliminate announcements

~~The argument I wish to prove is that~~ “trimming the fat” is the process of eliminating and getting rid of unnecessary information that is not needed in the assignment from the writing itself such as repetitive words, clichés, qualifiers, and other crucial mistakes that can make one’s writing too congested and wordy.

2. Eliminate repetitive words or ideas

“Trimming the fat” is the process of eliminating ~~and getting rid of~~ unnecessary information ~~that is not needed~~ in the assignment ~~from the writing itself~~ such as repetitive words, clichés, qualifiers, ~~and other crucial mistakes~~ that can make one’s writing too congested and wordy.

3. Replace general nouns with more specific ones

“Trimming the fat” is the process of eliminating unnecessary ~~information in the assignment~~ **words** such as repetitive words, clichés, qualifiers.

4. Group multiple ideas together into a singular verb or adjective

“Trimming the fat” is the process of eliminating unnecessary words from one’s writing such as repetitive words, clichés, qualifiers that can make one’s writing ~~too congested and wordy~~ **clearer**

Concise revision:

“Trimming the fat” is the process of making one’s writing clearer by eliminating unnecessary words such as repetitive words, clichés, and qualifiers.