

CONCISE WRITING

One thing that most English 1010 students need is help in writing concise sentences...your writing should be clear and concise, saying what you want with precision...words like wonderful, beautiful, amazing, awesome and the like are imprecise and vague because their connotations differ from person to person and situation to situation...this is where imagery, metaphor, simile and the like can express difficult emotions, feelings or impressions. Keep that in mind...most of you need to clear up those kinds of imprecise writing.

But there are so many other ways to write imprecisely that the way I attack this is by the notes I made in your personal narrative (pay attention to them) and by having you look at/use very long handouts dealing with precise writing.

PLEASE READ THROUGH THIS WHOLE DOCUMENT...IT IS THOROUGH AND ADDRESSES MANY TYPES OF ISSUES THAT I SEE IN MY ENGLISH 1010 CLASSES EVERY SEMESTER. I DON'T WANT TO MAKE YOU DO MENIAL WORKSHEETS OR QUIZZES, BUT I DO WANT YOU TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE INFO HERE. I **WILL** BE GRADING THE "CONCISE-NESS" OF YOUR WRITING BY A MORE DIFFICULT/DEMANDING STANDARD NEXT ESSAY, SO MAKE SURE YOU'VE READ THROUGH AND USE THIS... HERE IS THE WEB ADDRESS OF WHERE I GOT ALL THE INFO...THERE ARE ALSO QUIZZES THAT MOST OF YOU SHOULD TRY...

Writing Concise Sentences

Whether it's a two-word quip or a 200-word bear, a sentence must be a lean, thinking machine. Here are some notes toward efficiency and conciseness in writing.

PRUNING THE REDUNDANT

Avoid saying the same thing twice.

0. Many uneducated citizens ~~who have never attended school~~ continue to vote for better schools.

A phrase that repeats itself—like "true fact," "twelve noon," "I saw it with my own eyes"—is sometimes called a **pleonasm**.

Redundant phrases are bad habits just waiting to take control of your writing. Beware of the following.

Redundancy	The Lean Version
12 midnight	midnight
12 noon	noon
3 am in the morning	3 am
absolutely spectacular/phenomenal	spectacular/phenomenal
a person who is honest	an honest person
a total of 14 birds	14 birds
biography of her life	biography
circle around	circle
close proximity	proximity
completely unanimous	unanimous
consensus of opinion	consensus

cooperate together	cooperate
each and every	each
enclosed herewith	enclosed
end result	result
exactly the same	the same
final completion	completion
frank and honest exchange	frank exchange or honest exchange
free gift	gift
he/she is a person who . . .	he/she
important/basic essentials	essentials
in spite of the fact that	although
in the field of economics/law enforcement	in economics/law enforcement
in the event that	if
job functions	job or functions
new innovations	innovations
one and the same	the same
particular interest	interest
period of four days	four days
personally, I think/feel	I think/feel
personal opinion	opinion
puzzling in nature	puzzling
refer back	refer
repeat again	repeat
return again	return
revert back	revert
shorter/longer in length	shorter/longer
small/large in size	small/large
square/round/rectangular in shape	square/round/rectangular
summarize briefly	summarize
surrounded on all sides	surrounded
surrounding circumstances	circumstances
the future to come	the future
there is no doubt but that	no doubt
usual/habitual custom	custom
we are in receipt of	we have received

Abbreviated Redundancies

A special breed of redundancy is proliferating in our modern world as we embrace technology. Some people insist it is redundant to say "ATM machine" because "ATM" means "Automated Teller Machine," "HIV virus" because HIV means Human Immunodeficiency Virus, "AIDS unit" because CPU means Central Processing Unit. It sounds particularly silly to say "CD-ROM Unit units." It is perhaps too easy to get caught up in this, however. "CD-ROM" is a set of words, and the abbreviation ought to be allowed to act as modifier.

Reducing Clauses to Phrases, Phrases to Single Words

Be alert for clauses or phrases that can be pared to simpler, shorter constructions. The "which clause" can often be shortened to a simple adjective. (Be careful, however, not to lose some needed emphasis by over-pruning; the word "which," which is sometimes necessary [as it is in this sentence], is not *evil*.)

- 0. Smith College, which was founded in 1871, is the premier all-women's college in the United States.
- 0. Founded in 1871, Smith College is the premier all-women's college in the United States.
- 0. Citizens who knew what was going on voted him out of office.
- 0. Knowledgeable citizens voted him out of office.
- 0. Recommending that a student copy from another student's paper is not something he would recommend.
- 0. He wouldn't recommend that a student copy from another student's paper. (Or "He would never tell a student to copy")

Phrases, too, can sometimes be trimmed, sometimes to a single word.

- 0. Unencumbered by a sense of responsibility, Jasion left his wife

- with forty-nine kids and a can of beans.
0. Jason irresponsibly left his wife with forty-nine kids and a can of beans.(Or leave out the word altogether and let the act speak for itself.)

Intensifiers that Don't Intensify

Avoid using words such as *really*, *very*, *quite*, *extremely*, *severely* when they are not necessary. It is probably enough to say that the salary increase is *inadequate*. Does saying that it is *severely* inadequate introduce anything more than a tone of hysteria? These words shouldn't be banished from your vocabulary, but they will be used to best effect when used sparingly.

Avoiding Expletive Constructions

This sounds like something a politician has to learn to avoid, but, no, an *expletive construction* is a common device that often robs a sentence of energy before it gets a chance to do its work. Expletive constructions begin with *there is/are* or *it is*.

0. There are twenty-five students who have already expressed a desire to attend the program next summer. It is they and their parents who stand to gain the most by the government grant.
0. Twenty-five students have already expressed a desire to attend the program next summer. They and their parents stand to gain the most by the government grant.

Further information about expletive constructions is available on our page on [The Verb "To Be"](#).

Phrases You Can Omit

Be on the lookout for important sounding phrases that add nothing to the meaning of a sentence. Such phrases quickly put a

reader on guard that the writer is trading in puffery; worse, they put a reader to sleep.

Many but not all of these unnecessary phrases have been taken from *Quick Access: Reference for Writers* by Lynn Quitman Troyka. Simon & Schuster: New York. 1995. The examples, however, are our own. No political inferences should be drawn from these examples; they are merely models of form.

all things considered	All things considered, Connecticut's woodlands are in better shape now than ever before. All things considered, Connecticut's woodlands are in better shape now than ever before.
as a matter of fact	As a matter of fact, there are more woodlands in Connecticut now than there were in 1898. as a matter of fact, There are more woodlands in Connecticut now than there were in 1898.
as far as I'm concerned	As far as I'm concerned, there is no need for further protection of woodlands. As far as I'm concerned, there Further protection of woodlands is not needed.
at the present time	This is because there are fewer farmers at the present time. This is because there are fewer farmers now.
because of the fact that	Woodlands have grown in area because of the fact that farmers have abandoned their fields. Woodlands have grown in area because farmers have abandoned their fields.
by means of	Major forest areas are coming back by means of natural processes. Major forest areas are coming back through natural processes. (or naturally)
by virtue of the fact that	Our woodlands are coming back by virtue of the fact that our economy has shifted its emphasis. Our woodlands are coming back by virtue of the fact that because our economy has shifted its emphasis.
due to the fact that	Due to the fact that their habitats are being restored, forest creatures are also re-establishing their population bases. Due to the fact that Because their habitats are

	being restored, forest creatures are also re-establishing their population bases.
exists	The fear that exists among many people that we are losing our woodlands is uncalled for. The fear that exists among many people that we are losing our woodlands is uncalled for.
for all intents and purposes	The era in which we must aggressively defend our woodlands has, for all intents and purposes, passed. The era in which we must aggressively defend our woodlands has, for all intents and purposes , passed.
for the most part	For the most part, people's suspicions are based on a misunderstanding of the facts. For the most part, People's suspicions are based on a misunderstanding of the facts.
for the purpose of	Many woodlands, in fact, have been purchased for the purpose of creating public parks. Many woodlands, in fact, have been purchased for the purpose of creating as public parks.
have a tendency to	This policy has a tendency to isolate some communities. This policy has a tendency tends to isolate some communities.
in a manner of speaking	The policy has, in a manner of speaking, begun to Balkanize the more rural parts of our state. The policy has, in a manner of speaking , begun to Balkanize the more rural parts of our state.
in a very real sense	In a very real sense, this policy works to the detriment of those it is supposed to help. In a very real sense, this This policy works to the detriment of those it is supposed to help.
in my opinion	In my opinion, this wasteful policy ought to be revoked. In my opinion, this This wasteful policy ought to be revoked.
in the case of	In the case of this particular policy, citizens of northeast Connecticut became very upset. Citizens of northeast Connecticut became very

	upset about his policy.
in the final analysis	In the final analysis, the state would have been better off without such a policy. In the final analysis, the The state would have been better off without such a policy.
in the event that	In the event that enough people protest, it will probably be revoked. If enough people protest, it will probably be revoked.
in the nature of	Something in the nature of a repeal may soon take place. Something in the nature of like a repeal may soon take place.
in the process of	Legislators are already in the process of reviewing the statutes. Legislators are already in the process of reviewing the statutes.
it seems that	It seems that they can't wait to get rid of this one. It seems that they They can't wait to get rid of this one.
manner	They have monitored the activities of conservationists in a cautious manner. They have cautiously monitored the activities of conservationists.
the point I am trying to make	The point I am trying to make is that sometimes public policy doesn't accomplish what it set out to achieve. The point I am trying to make is that Sometimes public policy doesn't accomplish what it set out to achieve.
type of	Legislators need to be more careful of the type of policy they propose. Legislators need to be more careful of the type of policy they propose.
what I mean to say is	What I mean to say is that well intentioned lawmakers sometimes make fools of themselves. What I mean to say is that well Well intentioned lawmakers sometimes make fools of themselves.

In his eminently readable Web site, "**BANNED FOR LIFE**," Tom Mangan has collected the "favorite" clichés of editors and journalism instructors from around the world. If you read too much of this at once, you'll stop talking.

Eliminating Clichés and Euphemisms

A cliché is an expression that was probably, once upon a time, an original and brilliant way of saying something. Imagine being the first person to say something as clever as "She fell head over heels in love" or "She's cool as a cucumber." Sadly, though, such expressions eventually lose their luster and become trite and even annoying. Writers who indulge in tired language are not being respectful to their readers, and writers return the compliment by losing attention and going on to something else.

It is particularly galling when a writer or speaker relies on tired language to the point of creating a hodge-podge of mixed clichés and assorted vegetables. A mayor of Austin, Texas, once announced, to everyone's bewilderment, "I wanted all my ducks in a row, so if we did get into a posture, we could pretty much slam-dunk this thing and put it to bed."

Here is a list of trite expressions to look for in your writing and speaking. Create your own list of clichés by listening for them on radio talk-shows and casual conversation. Watch television ads and the headlines of sports columnists to find clichés that writers are playing with, adapting the meaning of a hackneyed expression until it turns into something clever (or, sometimes, not so clever). Click

HERE for a handful of examples taken from the sports pages of *The Hartford Courant*.

We also recommend **Brian Murphy's Big List of Clichés**, for a truly exhausting (but fun) list of things to avoid saying.

<p>acid test at loose ends babe in the woods better late than never brought back to reality black as pitch blind as a bat bolt from the blue busy as a bee/beaver cat's meow cool as a cucumber cool, calm, and collected crack of dawn crushing blow cry over spilt milk dead as a doornail dog-eat-dog world don't count your chickens died in the wool easier said than done easy as pie feathered friends face the music flash in the pan flat as a pancake gentle as a lamb go at it tooth and nail good time was had by all greased lightning happy as a lark head over heels heavy as lead horns of a dilemma</p>	<p>meaningful dialogue moving experience needle in a haystack open-and-shut case pain in the _____ point with pride pretty as a picture put it in a nutshell quick as a flash/wink rat race ripe old age ruled the roost sad but true sadder but wiser set the world on fire sick as a dog sigh of relief slow as molasses smart as a whip sneaking suspicion spread like wildfire straight as an arrow straw that broke the camel's back strong as an ox take the bull by the horns thin as a rail through thick and thin tired but happy to coin a phrase to make a long story short trial and error tried and true</p>
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<p>hour of need keep a stiff upper lip ladder of success last but not least looking a gift horse in the mouth</p>	<p>under the weather white as a sheet wise as an owl work like a dog worth its weight in gold</p>
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A **euphemism** is a word or phrase that substitutes for language the speaker or writer feels is too blunt or somehow offensive. When people die, we say, instead, that they have "passed away" or "met their maker" or "gone to sleep." And, at the silly extreme, a *garbage collector* is a *sanitation engineer*, a *janitor* is a *custodial engineer*. What the writer must guard against is the tendency of euphemisms not only to shield readers from harsh reality but also to obfuscate meaning and truth. The military is especially guilty of this: *bombing raids* become *surgical air-strikes* and *armies* become *peace-keeping forces*. Good writing tells the truth and tells it plain.

Gary B. Larson ("Garbl") maintains three helpful Web pages on concise writing:

- 0. [Wordy Phrase Replacements](#)
- 0. [Shorter, Simpler Words](#)
- 0. [Redundant Phrase Replacements](#)

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