Concise writing “rule”

There are many “rules” of concise writing. Here are a few.

1. **Avoid expletive construction**: “There are” or “There were” or “It is” etc. These are weak and wordy. Cut them and reword the sentence.
2. **Passive Voice**: Don’t use it.

Passive voice is when you’ve taken the action from the subject and given it to the object.

Passive: The ball was kicked by Sally.

Active: Sally kicked the ball.

Mostly, you want to avoid the passive voice (which uses the “to be” verbs—is, am, are, was, were etc) because it’s wordy and weak. But there are times when, for style or rhetoric goals, you may want to use it. Be careful about it.

1. **Avoid a heavy noun style**. The following sentence has 10 nouns:

Thomas Jefferson was not a believer in the divinity of Jesus Christ and indeed was the author of a version of the Four Gospels that included the removal of all references to “miraculous” events.

You can easily rewrite the sentence, making some of the nouns into verbs, etc. Now, nouns aren’t bad, but they often require prepositions (things you can do to a cloud: in,on,under,above, etc). These aren’t inherently bad either, but they get wordy when they pile up in a sentence. Gets clunky. So, when you can and it doesn’t make the sentence more awkward, take them out. Change nouns to verbs, etc.

*The FTA will conduct an* ***investigation*** *on the charges against our company.*

*The FTA will* ***investigate*** *the charges against our company.*

*Four individual units are the* ***equivalent*** *of one set.*

*Four units* ***equal*** *one set.*

*The manager’s secretary may be of* ***assistance*** *to you.*

*The manager’s secretary may* ***assist*** *you.*

*Rebecca’s bathing suit boutique has a* ***tendency*** *to be more* ***profitable*** *in the spring.*

*Rebecca’s bathing suit boutique* ***tends*** *to* ***profit*** *more in the spring.*

*The countries have not yet come to an* ***agreement*** *on the border issue.*

*The countries still do not* ***agree*** *on the border issue.*

*(*from thescribesource.com)

Not only are the verb versions of these sentences shorter, they are also more interesting than their noun alternatives. Check your writing for noun-heavy sentences and use more active verbs whenever possible.

Here’s another way to infuse more action into your writing and make it more concise.

1. **Avoid unnecessary repetition:**
   1. 12 noon.
   2. I was suddenly taken by surprise

These things are wordy and can be condensed without losing meaning or much style.

1. **Avoid meaningless intensifiers: so, really, very, pretty, actually, basically**
   1. These are used to “intensify” a situation. They may be fine in speech but are generally unnecessary in writing. “Absolutely spectacular” is redundant because it’s either spectacular or not. Absolutely does nothing to intensify.
   2. A note on the word “so”:

So is a conjunction and a comparison word. “The bathroom was closed, so we had to find another.” And “I was so tired I fell asleep in my clothes—shoes and all.” If you say “I was so tired.” I sit there waiting for the rest of the thought. “So tired that what? You fell asleep mid-stride before getting to your bed?” Be careful with the word “so.”

1. **Change wordy clauses to phrases**
   1. The diff. between a clause and a phrase:
      1. Clauses have both a noun and a verb, phrases have one or the other
         1. On the way to grandma’s house before we got to the bridge….(clause)
         2. While driving there, (phrase)

*Smith College, which was founded in 1871, is the premier all-women’s college in the United States.* HOW TO FIX: “which was founded” is an appositive, it is unnecessary and can be condensed. “Smith College, founded in 1871, is *the premier all-women’s college in the United States.”*

* 1. If you can change a clause to a phrase without losing meaning or style, do so

1. **Change wordy phrases to a single word**
   1. Like number 6, don’t sacrifice style, but be brief when you can be.
2. **Don’t be vague**
   1. Much like the intensifiers, don’t use wording that is meaningless. Be careful of the words “things,” “stuff” and others like that.
3. **Get rid of unnecessary “fillers”**

For example, “Due to the fact that she is always late, we told her the party started thirty minutes earlier.” It could read “Because she is always late, we told her…” or “She is always late, so we told her…”

1. **Don’t use clichés.**  Cliches are overused, trite, and now meaningless sayings. They are often metaphors (“her eyes sparkled like diamonds). If you’ve heard it before, don’t use it because it’s already known and is now BORING. Be creative.

I’VE ALSO PRINTED A BUNCH OF INCORRECT SENTENCES. I’D LIKE YOU TO FIX EACH AND IDENTIFY THE PROBLEMS IN THEM. RETURN IT TO ME AS AN ASSIGNMENT.