

## Conciseness

Many new university students believe their papers should be written in a complex style so that their arguments seem more sophisticated. However, the top priority in all writing is **clarity of expression**, so academic writing **must be simple and straight-forward**. When properly applied, the following techniques will help you to make your sentences more concise.

**Active Vs. Passive Voice:** You can easily identify passive sentences because they include some form of the auxiliary verb ‘to be’ alongside a past tense verb and then the preposition ‘by’ preceding the subject noun.

**Ex. The analysis was completed by the researcher during the fourth cycle. (11 words)**

The active form of this sentence eliminates the unnecessary auxiliary and preposition and positions the subject at the beginning of the sentence.

**Ex. The researcher completed the analysis during the fourth cycle. (9 words)**

**Note:** In the Sciences, passive voice is often appropriate because the subject noun is irrelevant, and therefore omitted.

**Ex. The analysis was completed during the fourth cycle. (8 words)**

**Clutter Phrases:** Many writers use these short phrases because they seem more sophisticated than their simpler alternatives. In most cases, the simple version should be used.

Complex	Simple
In order to	to
In the course of	during
A considerable amount of	much
In the direction of	toward

**Expletive Constructions:** Common in spoken English, these constructions place variations of ‘**there is/are**’ and ‘**it is**’ at the beginning of sentences. In most cases, these extra words can be eliminated.

**Ex. There are too many people in this room.**

**Revised Ex. Too many people are in this room.**

**Modifiers:** Reduce adjectival and adverbial phrases to simple adjectives and adverbs.

**Ex. The mixture, which was red and frothy, was added to the centrifuge. (12 words)**

**Revised Ex. The frothy, red mixture was added to the centrifuge. (9 words)**

**Redundancy:** Different from repetition, which is the overuse of a single word, redundancy is ‘filler’ whereby the writer expresses the same idea multiple times, but using different words each time. Redundancy can be a problem of only a few words:

Redundant	Correct
Round in shape	Round
Positive benefits	Benefits
Prove conclusively	Prove
Connected together	Connected

Or entire sentences can be redundant:

**Ex. Harker’s study is valuable because of its identification of four key components of stress. Importantly, this study describes those components in detail.**

**Possessives:** To indicate possession, many languages use specific particles that syntactically place the item before the owner of that item. **Ex. The large wings of the fruit bat** uses ‘of’ to indicate possession.



In English, the more concise way of expressing possession is to use the apostrophe with the letter ‘s’.

**Ex. The fruit bat’s large wings** **Note:** When the item requires emphasis, use the previous form.



**Nouns and Verbs:** Students often use more ‘academic-sounding’ nouns where they could use verbs.

**Ex. They made the statement that bargaining was needed. (8 words)**



**Revised Ex. They stated that bargaining was needed. (6 words)**



**Compound Sentences:** When two consecutive sentences have the same **subject**, use conjunctions to make a longer sentence with fewer words.

**Ex. The participants signed a confidentiality agreement. The participants then completed the survey. (12 words)**

**Ex. The participants signed a confidentiality agreement and then completed the survey. (11 words)**