

REDUCING WORDINESS

Word count limits often prevent writers from covering everything they want to say on a topic. Editing your paper to reduce the word count can help you distill your ideas to their essential parts, improving both the quality and clarity of your writing.

A witticism attributed to Blaise Pascal apologizes, “I have made this longer than usual because I have not had time to make it shorter.”

TIPS FOR CUTTING WORDS

1. **Focus on the essential topic(s) and purpose of the paper** – Ask yourself how each section, paragraph, and sentence contributes to the claim or argument of your paper. Remove or refine sections that do not contribute to your assignment’s objectives.
2. **Remove redundancy** – Review your paper for repetition. Make sure you do not have the same paragraph twice and refrain from rehashing the same point later in your paper. Your argument should build on itself—not repeat itself. Similarly, if you already clearly explained a concept, you do not need to rephrase it in multiple ways.
3. **Turn quotes into paraphrases and summaries** – Rather than including lengthy quotes from your sources, paraphrase or summarize the source.

For more information on paraphrasing, see our handout, “[A Guide to Paraphrasing Correctly.](#)”

4. **Use fewer words to express the same idea** – Try rephrasing a paragraph or deleting extra details while still getting the main point across.

A). Remove non-essential transitions – While transitions help readers smoothly progress from one section of your paper to the next, lengthy transitions use up words without providing much extra value.

⊙ Furthermore, all the reasons mentioned above demonstrate that consumers prefer the texture and density of waffles. Adding to this body of research, Smith (2020) confirmed this preference in a quantitative study with 300 participants. Additionally, consumers also prefer waffles for their flavor.

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B). Move your subjects to the beginning of your sentences – Moving the subject to the beginning of your sentences often eliminates words, and it also makes your sentences clearer.

- ⊙ After returning from a long, luxurious stroll in 70° weather under a perfect blue sky, the children ate ice cream.
- ✓ The children ate ice cream after an ideal walk.

For more information on making smooth transitions, see our handout "[Flow and Transitions](#)."

C). Write actively – Often, passive sentences are more wordy than active sentences.

- ⊙ The ball was thrown across the room by John.
- ✓ John threw the ball across the room.

For more information on writing actively, see our handout, "[Writing in the Active Voice](#)."

D). Write one sentence instead of two – Some sentences contain information that can easily be incorporated into one sentence.

- ⊙ President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. The event devastated the country.
- ✓ The 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy devastated the country.

E). Scrutinize prepositional phrases – Some prepositional phrases are unnecessary or add extra words.

- ⊙ In the biology class, the students' experiment in the lab was a success.
- ✓ The biology students' experiment was a success.

HELPFUL HINT

Writers often struggle to cut words after investing time and effort into their work. Creating a separate "recycle bin" document allows them to paste anything cut from their paper, making it easy to retrieve if needed later.

Another option is to read through the paper, highlight sections for potential cuts, and prioritize by removing the least favorite parts first. This way, writers can meet the word limit while keeping their favorite sections intact.

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