

Revision for Concision



Vigorous writing is concise. 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. That requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

--William Strunk, *The Elements of Style*

1. *To be/is* verbs



- Go through and find all the "to be" or "is" verbs: these words describe the “states of being” of people or things in a sentence.
- Examples: is, was, has been, will be, are, become. Now, **UNDERLINE** all of them.
- Next, go through and find all your verbs that end in -ing. Put a **STAR** on these. When you revise, try and get rid of half of the to be verbs and the -ing verbs (present participle). For example: "James is signing." How about: "James sings." Remember: when the aliens come, they'll eat the -ing verbs first.

To be/is verbs



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- For example: "James is signing." How about: "James sings." Remember: when the aliens come, they'll eat the -ing verbs first.

2. Preposition Hunt



- Next, go on a preposition hunt: a **PREPOSITION** is any word or group of words that relates a noun or pronoun to another word in a sentence.

Preposition Hunt



- Some common prepositions: about, after, among, behind, down up, from, of, off, past, before, underneath, with, above, during, beyond, in, since, until, within, according to, along, at beside, by except, into, on, through, up, without, across, amid, before, besides, concerning, for, like, over toward, upon.

Preposition Hunt



- CIRCLE each preposition. During revision, see if you can get rid of half of them.

Preposition Hunt



- Remember: If something costs \$1.01, a penny is necessary. And if you go to the store, well, the "to," like the penny, is necessary. But rather than getting back 99 cents in change, how about giving the clerk a penny, but only if needed. Right?
- You don't want a lot of change, or hiccups, or prepositions in your writing. Necessary, yes, but use them only when there is no other choice.

3. Windup Phrases



- These are phrases, usually prepositional phrases, that set up an idea to be expressed in a sentence.

3. Windup Phrases



- Some windups are necessary or important to the meaning of the sentences they introduce, but others just make sentences wordy or unnecessarily complex. Deciding whether a windup is necessary or not depends on the context.

3. Windup Phrases



Examples of windups:

- “According to the results...” “In the next part of the lab...” “In order to understand X concept...”
- **PUT THEM IN BRACKETS**
- In revision, stick to what Hemingway said: “Don't confuse movement for action.” Or, as I say, “If you got a 105 mile per hour fast ball, why throw a knuckleball.” Just let it go.

4. It/This/That/Because/Which



- Put a SQUARE around each of these.
- Go back and get rid of most of them.
- Feel your writing jump off the page.
- Remember: Less is More. Recession writing. Save your words.

5. FANBOYS



- Put a TRIANGLE around each one. Now, remove the COMMA before the FANBOY (you should have one. Right?)

5. FANBOYS



- REPLACE with a SEMI-COLON, which will join the two independent clauses (group of words containing a subject and verb, and expresses a complete thought; this is also a complete sentence).

5. FANBOYS



- Feel around for FANBOYS (coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).
- Put a TRIANGLE around each one. Now, remove the COMMA before the FANBOY (you should have one. Right?) and REPLACE with a SEMI-COLON, which will join the two independent clauses (group of words containing a subject and verb, and expresses a complete thought; this is also a complete sentence).

6. COLON



- Find a sentence that introduces a quote. She said, "I told you..." Now, remove the comma and replace with a colon there.
- She said: "I told you..."

7. INDEPENDENT CLAUSES



- Find two sentences (independent clauses) where the second sentence, or word, even, amplifies and intensifies the first. I now knew exactly what I had to do: either learn how to write an introduction or fail the class. Or how about this. Only one thing matters in Medley's class: revision.

8. JELLY DONUT SENTENCE



- Find a sentence (or create one) with a parenthetical expression (expression which is inserted into the flow of thought. It may be in the middle of a sentence or between sentences, but it does not deal directly with the topic at hand. In other words, it does not have to be there, but makes the sentence taste much better.)
- Create a jelly donut sentence. For example: Mrs. Crabtree—who paraded around school with her nose in the air—was a stickler for grammar.

9. EXPUNGE CLICHE



- Find a CLICHE: language that has lost its freshness and registers with a listener or reader as overused and boring.
- For example: "bubble was burst"; "busy as a bee"; "tired as a dog."
- Put a SQUIGGLY line beneath it.
- Go back and try and it with something original.

10. REPLACE SIMILES



- Find a SIMILE: a comparison of two unlike things using the word "like" or "as." For example: "big as a bus"; "bright as day"; "cold as ice." Replace it with something original

11. CREATE A METAPHOR



- Come up with a METAPHOR: concept of understanding one ABSTRACT (LIFE) thing in terms of another more specific thing (HIGHWAY).
- Life is a highway.
- "The courage of a lion"; "Heart of stone." Create your own metaphor.

CREATE A METAPHOR



- Find a place in your paper where you really want to convey an abstract, deep message in a specific, practical way that everyone can understand.
- Put a bunch of STARS by it: "Love is a battlefield."
- "The courage of a lion"
- "Heart of stone."

CREATE A METAPHOR



- Now create your own, original, unique metaphor.