

Writing: Cut the excess to gain impact

We all try to be brief as possible, but it's easy to fall into four traps that lead to wordiness.

1. Nouns Made from Verbs

Nouns like *implementation*, *development*, and *emphasis* require more supporting words than the verbs they come from—*implement*, *develop*, and *emphasize*. So use the verbs.

Wordy: The changes will lead to the *enhancement* of the program.

Shorter: The changes will *enhance* the program.

Wordy: We conducted an *evaluation* of the department.

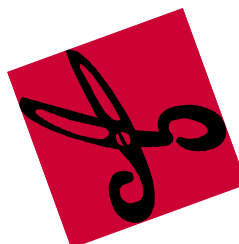
Shorter: ???

Look at words ending in *-ment*, *-ance*, *-sis*, and *-tion* as red flags that signal wordiness. Where possible, replace these noun-verbs with verbs.

2. Multi-Word Phrases

Replace the multi-word phrase with a shorter phrase or the single-word equivalent.

<u>Wordy Phrase</u>	<u>Single Word or Shorter Phrase</u>
for the purpose of	to
in light of the fact that	because
I am of the opinion	I think
in the event that	???



3. False Starters

We often begin sentences with *it is* and *there are*, which add no substance. Consider restructuring such sentences without these empty beginnings.

Wordy: *It is* our intention to revise the plan.

Shorter: We intend to revise the plan.

Wordy: *There is* a pamphlet entitled "Disaster Recovery" that belongs in every company's library.

Shorter: The pamphlet "Disaster Recovery" belongs in every company's library.

Wordy: *There are* six programs you can choose from.

Shorter: ???:

4. Slovenly Expression

Most wordy writing stems from the writer's not zeroing in on the point.

Wordy: Listed below are major internal barriers that we have identified as impediments to our ability to deliver quality service. (19 words)

Shorter: ??? (Can you cut it to 11 words?)

Speaking: Fielding impromptu questions

During a meeting, the boss suddenly asks you for a comment. How do you handle this impromptu speaking task?

1. Listen to the question.

Don't let your sense of surprise overtake you and don't waste time figuring out ulterior motives. Focus on the essence of the question.

2. Satisfy the expectation.

Address the main point, the key concepts such as *reasons*, *benefits*, *effects*. Don't wander into a self-serving discourse or defensive plea.

3. Be brief.

4. Be concrete. State your point and explain or illustrate it—without violating step 3.

5. Trust yourself. If you panic, you'll ignore the first four steps and inflict more harm. Trust what you know.

Source: Persuasive Business Speaking, *Elayne Snyder, amacom, 1990.*

When you need...

...help writing a business plan, newsletter, proposal, or website copy, just contact Cos Ferrara at 201-391-0178 or drcff@aol.com, or via my website: www.cosferrara.com

E-mail: Blind copies and default signatures

A seldom-used e-mail feature is the Blind Copy button. As its name implies, the Blind Copy button enables you to send one message to many recipients without any of them knowing who else is receiving that message.

In addition to keeping that information confidential, the Blind Copy button enables you to protect the e-mail addresses of all of those recipients.

Respect Readers' Privacy

While the people you write to may be glad to hear from you, they may not want to be receiving unsolicited mail from the other people on your distribution list. Respect the privacy of people you mail to.

Use the Blind Copy button.

Use Your Default Signature

Another neat feature is the default signature. Many e-mail systems enable you to create a default signature that appears in the message box when you start to send an e-mail. You can customize that default signature so that all of your relevant information appears without your having to key any of it in.

Your readers might need to know your full name, company name, title, department, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address, and website.

Some systems enable you to have more than one de-



fault signature so you can provide different sets of information for different audiences, all with the click of a single key.

People get so much e-mail. Make it easy for them to recognize your mail as yours.

Mechanics: Anchor the floating *this*



The word *this* normally precedes another word: *this problem*, *this office*. Confusion reigns when *this* is not anchored to a specific noun and the reader has to ask, "*this what?*"

Unclear: The new marketing plan calls for the addition of a telemarketing unit. *This* has been developed after careful research and analysis.

This what has been developed? *This unit?* *This addition?* *This plan?* Eliminate the ambiguity by anchoring the floating *this* to the noun it refers to:

Clear: The new marketing plan calls for the addition of a telemarketing unit. *This plan* has been developed after careful research and analysis.

Sometimes writers use *this* to imply "all of the above." But

that kind of sloppiness puts an undue burden on the reader.

Unclear: The formal procedure calls for us to date each resume that comes in and forward to the hiring manager those that match the basic requirements. *This* is not happening.

This what is not happening?

Clear: The formal procedure calls for us to date each resume that comes in and forward to the hiring manager those that match the basic requirements. *This procedure* is not being followed.

Ask, "*This what?*" Then anchor the floating *this*.

A Reader Asks...



My grammar check keeps flagging my use of *which* and *that*. Can you explain the difference between them?

Both *which* and *that* introduce clauses describing a word.

If the clause is **essential** to the meaning of the sentence, use *that* to introduce it:

Essential: The manual *that we created* is still in use.

The meaning of the sentence would be completely different without the clause (italicized words). It identifies the specific manual, so the clause is considered essential.

A **nonessential** clause merely adds information. Omitting such a clause would not change the sentence's basic meaning.

Nonessential: The company mission statement, *which Fugelsoe himself designed*, became law.

Note: Nonessential clauses, introduced by *which*, are set off by commas.

When the clause is essential, use *that*.
When the clause is nonessential, use *which*.