

SSU Writing Center

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Editing for Concision and Clarity (Some Classic Advice)

Editing for concision and clarity is the micro-level work you do to move your writing from flabby and clumsy to graceful and sleek. This kind of editing won't help you figure out what you wish to say, and it won't substitute for your basic research, but it **will** help you clarify your ideas and communicate them in pleasing and strong ways, so that readers will enjoy reading your work. The following advice is adapted from a classic work in the field of writing: *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, by Joseph Williams.

1. Favor subject-verb-object sentences; avoid the passive unless your particular genre dictates that you use it:

The research methodology was designed by the researchers following guidelines determined during the pilot study.

Better: We designed our methodology following guidelines determined during the pilot study.

It was determined that the positive results could be attributed to the supportive social network of the workers' community.

Better: We (or Our study) determined that the workers' supportive social network was the chief factor in the study's positive results.

Or better yet: The workers' strong social network created a positive outcome.

2. Favor strong verbs over large, Latinate nouns (ending in -ion, -ism, -ent, -ence, etc.)

The manager made a decision to perform a review of the proposal.

Better: The manager decided to review the proposal.

Adherence to the SSU regulations concerning ethical use of human subjects is mandatory for all students working on MA theses.

Better: MA students conducting thesis research need to follow SSU's regulations [or rules] concerning how to use human subjects.

3. Eliminate redundancy, meaningless modifiers, excess verbiage, and obvious implications.

At this point in time, the Chair generally reads and reviews the minutes from the last meeting, while each individual faculty member takes notes on the factors of key importance to their particular concerns.

Better: The Chair will next review the minutes from the last meeting, while the faculty note their concerns.

First and foremost, our fine institution, Sonoma State University, really deserves the support of the colleagues who form our alumni, who, we can rest assured, represent an untapped financial resource in our goal to increase scholarship funds.

First, Sonoma State deserves the support of our alumni to help fund scholarships.

4. Some simpler and more concise ways to say things:

the reason for, due to the fact that, on account of, considering the fact that
use **because**

regardless of the fact that, despite the fact that, notwithstanding the fact that
use **although**

on the occasion of, in a situation in which, under circumstances in which
use **when**

in reference to, with regard to, concerning the matter of
use **about**

is able to, has the opportunity to, is in a position to, has the capacity for
use **can**

prior to, in anticipation of, subsequent to, following on, simultaneously with
use **before, after, as**

Clean out negatives:

not many = few

not different = alike, similar to

not the same = different

did not = failed to

does not have = lacks
not old enough = too young
did not consider = ignored
not able = unable

did not stay = left
did not remember = forgot
not possible = impossible
not certain = uncertain

Some Exercises

Make the following sentences better.

1. The intention of the committee is the improvement of company morale.

2. A decision on the part of the Dean in regard to the funding by the Department of the program must be made for there to be adequate staff preparation.

3. Administration overrun anticipation capability reviews are being instituted to prevent surprise military equipment cost prediction problems.

4. If and when we can define and establish our final aims and goals, each and every member of our group will be ready and willing to offer aid and assistance.

5. In this world of today, official government red tape is seriously destroying initiative among individual business executives.

6. In the area of educational activities, tight financial conditions are forcing school board members to cut back in nonessential areas in a drastic manner.

7. Energy used to power our industries and homes will in the years to come will be increasingly expensive in terms of dollars and cents.

(All examples on this page are from Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. 2nd ed. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman. Pp. 29-30 and 93-94.)