

Module 5:

Revising for Concision

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Module	5 – Revising for Concision
Module Learning Outcomes	
By the end of this module students will be able to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Avoid unnecessary repetition. [CLO 4, 5] 2. Use revision to refine meaning, clarity, and purpose. [CLO 3, 4, 5] 3. Recognize the difference between revision and proofreading. [CLO 4, 5] 4. Reconstruct sentences accurately using varied syntax. [CLO 1, 4, 5] 5. Write with directness in an engineering context. [CLO 1, 5] 	

Resources (Bank)	
Item	Description of how to be used
Sample Paragraph (Wordy)	Used for analysis and practice during session
Sample Paragraph (Concise)	Used for analysis and practice during session
Avoiding Wordiness Exercise	See instructions
Avoiding Wordiness Answers	See instructions
Concision Resource	To be used to assist students with concision

Face to Face Workshop Plan	
Description of Workshop	Students will analyze a paragraph to identify genre, lexicogrammatical choices, and the impact on clarity and directness before practicing revision for concision. Ideally, students will bring one of their own assignments to use for further practice.
Time for Completion	60 – 90 minutes
Materials	Separate copies of sample wordy paragraph and concise paragraph - one for each student Multi-coloured highlighters or pens

Workshop Preparation Instructions	<p>Students should be instructed to bring an introduction, executive summary or abstract from one of their own assignments to the workshop as a practice sample.</p> <p>Instructors may also wish to prepare a list of resources for further practice including the Purdue Owl Concision Information.</p>
Procedure	<p>Step 1: Instructors distribute the first sample paragraph (~10 minutes)</p> <p>Ask students to read the paragraph. Ask students to identify the main purpose of the two paragraphs, what kind of document would they expect to contain paragraphs such as these? Why? What word choices and sentence structure choices might indicate the purpose and intended readers of these paragraphs?</p> <p><i>Facilitator Notes:</i> It is important that the students identify the exaggerations, repetitions and overly complex sentences in the sample rather than the instructor pointing them out.</p> <p>Step 2: Revising for concision and clarity (~10 minutes)</p> <p>Ask students to revise the paragraph for clarity and concision. Challenge the students to cut 100 words without losing meaning.</p> <p>Step 3: In pairs ask students to compare the changes they made (~10 minutes)</p> <p>Take up one or two examples from the students to explain why they made the change and ensure students have not lost the meaning.</p> <p><i>Facilitator Notes:</i> Getting students to explain why they made their edits provides the opportunity to bring to conscious awareness the differences between lexical choices, simple versus complex sentences, active versus passive voice constructions, and the impact those choices can have on clarity and concision.</p> <p>Step 4: Introduce students to a step-by-step process for achieving more concision in their writing (~15 minutes)</p> <p>FIRST: If using the sample paragraph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify main point(s) and their relationships

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Underline or highlight the main idea(s) in each sentence (the subject and verb) ● Identify information essential to understanding the main point(s) and their relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Underline or highlight in a different colour the most important information a reader needs to know in order to understand the point ● Underline or highlight in a different colour essential specific details that are more pertinent or relevant <p>If using students' writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask students to identify what they believe to be the main ideas, relevant information and specific details and then locate them in their draft <p>SECOND:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What isn't underlined or highlighted? ● Does it contribute to the purpose or meaning in any way? ● Can you make an argument for what it contributes? If not—cut it! When in doubt, cut it out. <p>THIRD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making the sentences/paragraph readable or “Wordsmithing” ● Making decisions about word choice and sentence structures ● Getting the right verb - lets you cut adjectives in many cases <p><i>Facilitators Notes:</i></p> <p>It may be useful to introduce students to Princeton's WordNet search at this point. Based on a corpus of current usage, the dictionary provides examples of the many meaning's words may have and can help students develop more nuanced definitions of the words they are using.</p> <p><i>Facilitator Notes:</i></p> <p>Students are often dependent on bilingual dictionaries. These are not bad, but rather, they are incomplete. It is important to let students know that they are often getting incomplete information including outdated or only the most common meanings of words. They need to take the word their bilingual dictionary gives them and look that word up on a site like the Princeton's WordNet search to see the various meanings the word can have along with sample sentences. They need to do this before making a final choice. If they want to be very complete and check their knowledge in their first language, they can take the word they found and put that in their bilingual dictionary and see what they find. It may or</p>
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	<p>may not be the word they started with. If it isn't, it may be interesting to find out why.</p> <p>Step 5: Using all this information (~10 minutes)</p> <p>Students now take their sample and see which pair can get it to 90 words without losing essential meaning.</p> <p><i>Facilitators Notes:</i> Students have been revising until this point. It is important to point this out to students. Proofreading, a very important step, is done last. It is done after a writer is satisfied that the meaning is clear, all essential information is included, and all irrelevant information has been cut.</p> <p>Step 6: Proofreading (~5 minutes)</p> <p>Now, students can do the easy part—proofreading. It is easier to proofread something you haven't written, so, have pairs exchange their final paragraphs for proofreading (spelling, capitalization, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, singular-plural forms, etc.)</p> <p>Step 7: Comparing the Sample (~5 minutes)</p> <p>Give students the sample concise paragraph (89 words) and have them compare their attempts. Did anyone edit down lower than 89 words? Were they able to maintain the meaning?</p>
Supplemental Material	<p>Purdue Owl Concision Exercises: Used as reference for concision strategies/techniques</p> <p>Avoiding Wordiness Exercise: Used to provide additional practice</p>
Assessment	<p>Self-assessment: How close do students get to the goal of 89 words in the practice sample?</p>

Resources

SAMPLE PARAGRAPH (WORDY)

Rosewood Mall tucked behind a lush planting of regional foliage and forest is located only a precious few minutes from the airport or train station at 1873 Rosewood Blvd. It promises options for a luxurious and comfortable place to rest and relax in a well-appointed 150-room hotel along with a movie theatre containing three separate screening spaces showing the latest blockbuster films or, if preferred, live theatre featuring the latest hits from Broadway and London's West End capable of handling up to 500 theatre guests. Sustenance for the body is catered to through the rich variety of six superb gourmet restaurants and food stands that can in combination provide seats for 245 discerning diners scattered throughout the extremely well-managed and maintained avenue of edible delights that features exquisite regional specialties. Furthermore, facilities are available in a 2-story center to provide opportunities to attend to fitness and health needs. The mall provides discerning customers with a plethora of choices where they might browse and compare options for everyday needs or a special gift. With 720 places to shelter your car from the elements, guests can choose to arrive in the comfort of their own vehicles.

Rosewood Mall managements always puts efficiency, safety, environmentally-friendly practices and processes and ethical responsibility first by continually improving and updating the well-managed facilities anticipating before customers or vendors know themselves maintenance needs and opportunities for improving and bettering facilities. They respond within 48 hours to any maintenance or repair issue, of which there are only a minute number as the mall has passed two safety of its regularly scheduled safety inspections in the past five years with another one scheduled, exceeding provincial inspection requirements.

SAMPLE PARAGRAPH (CONCISE)

Rosewood Mall located at 1873 Rosewood Blvd is separated from the highway by deciduous and evergreen foliage. It houses a 150-room hotel, a 3-screen movie theatre, a 500-seat capacity performance venue, a two-story fitness center, 6 restaurants with a combined capacity of 245 seats and parking capacity of 720 cars located on the mall rooftop. The mall has passed two safety inspections in the past five years. The management follows a protocol for reporting maintenance needs and responds within 48 hours to any reported problems.

AVOIDING WORDINESS

Writing should be clear and concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words. This worksheet is designed to build your skills in writing by avoiding redundancy and using as little words as possible without changing the meaning.

Examples: In my opinion, I think we should go ahead with the plan can be shortened to:

In my opinion, we should go ahead with the plan.

I think we should go ahead with the plan.

We should go ahead with the plan.

EXERCISE

Rewrite the following sentences in a more concise way by removing the redundant words or expressions.

1. I couldn't sleep and woke up in the wee hour of the morning at 3:00 a.m.
2. You should not repeat the same mistake again.
3. They are in complete agreement with one another.
4. The troop was surrounded on all sides by the enemy.
5. In future to come, Jason wants to study medicine and be a doctor.
6. As I see it, I don't see any reason why a person who is honest should do it that way.
7. The reason why he kept telling me about it was because he was worried that I did not believe him.

AVOIDING WORDINESS

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. I couldn't sleep and woke up at 3:00 a.m.
2. You should not repeat the same mistake.
3. They agree with one another.
4. The troop was surrounded by the enemy.
5. Jason wants to study medicine and be a doctor in future.
6. I don't see any reason for an honest person to do it that way.
7. He kept telling me about it because he was worried that I did not believe him.

CONCISION RESOURCE

Students use the provided checklist to achieve concision:

- Intensifiers (very, really), qualifiers (quite, sometimes), absolutes (definitely, absolutely, always)
- Choose qualifiers with purpose—important to your argument
- There is/there are —search for all instances of forms of “to be” such as is, are, was, were
- All writers use some form of “there is, there are, it is, it was, etc. in first and second drafts.” They act as pauses while the writer thinks. When revising, these sentences need to be restructured. Simply replacing a word or cutting a word will not help in clarity or concision.
- Identify subject and action (the verb), revise the sentence
- Pronouns - Identify the pronoun and its referent. When pronouns are physically separated by a clause or two from their referents, ambiguity is usually created.
- Repetition has a place — when constructing an argument, introducing a new idea or concept repeating the word or the phrase helps the reader become familiar with it.
- Making choices between clarity and concision. Sometimes clarity demands more words rather than fewer words. It becomes a judgment call—given the audience and the purpose which is more important-the number of words or the clarity of the sentence?
- Making the right word choices for precision in meaning
- Now is the time to use a dictionary, but reading beyond the first, common definition. Meaning needs to be clear and precise.
- Checking dictionaries, usage and definition.