

Writing Concisely

A Writing Resource created by the James Madison University Writing Center

Are you concerned that your writing is “wordy” and want help with sentence revision?

Understanding writing as a process, one that allows writers to work through ideas and form opinions, reveals why original drafts are often bogged down by unnecessary words. Revision produces concise writing. Revision strategies, such as Richard Lanham’s Paramedic Method, help writers recognize wordy sentences and provide steps to write more concisely.

[Sample sentence] –**In my opinion, in response to the issue of wordy sentences in college writing, it is my belief that a tool for revision is needed.**

Step 1: Eliminate slow wind-ups and redundancies, such as *in my opinion, my point is that*, etc.

~~In my opinion~~, in response to the issue of wordy sentences in college writing, it is my belief that a tool for revision is needed.

Step 2: Circle the prepositional phrases. A string of prepositional phrases also creates redundancies. There are numerous prepositions that position us in time, space, and movement. Common prepositions include *as, at, but, down, with, of, for, on*, etc. Try to avoid three or more in a row. If you need further help identifying prepositions, refer to the handout on the Link Library.

[In response] [to the issue] [of wordy sentences] [in college writing], it is my belief that a tool [for revision] is needed.

It is my belief that for college writers, a tool for revision is needed.

Step 3: Find the action

Be careful of the unnecessary “to be” verb, such as *is, was, will be, seems to be, have been*, etc. These verbs often create a *lurking action*.

It is my belief that for college writers, a tool for revision is needed.

Step 4: Turn the lurking action into an active verb.

It is my belief that for college writers, a tool for revision is needed.

believe

Step 5: After you have found the action, ask **who or **what** is doing the action.**

The implied actor in the sample sentence is “I.”

I believe that for college writers, a tool for revision is needed.

Step 6: Write the action concisely. To make your idea concise, you may have to *rethink* your sentence. What does the subject “believe”?

I believe college students need sentence revision strategies.

Common slow-wind ups:

In my opinion

What I wish to show here

What I would like to signal here

My point is

My contention is

My first point is

The fact of the matter is

Finally, the result is that

Another Example:

[Sample sentence] –**What I wish to show here is that James Madison University is a good representation of a place with many backgrounds and interests of the students.**

Step 1: Eliminate slow wind-ups and redundancies.

~~What I wish to show here is that~~ James Madison University is a good representation of a place with many backgrounds and interests of the students.

Step 2: Circle the prepositional phrases.

James Madison University is a good representation **of** a place **with** many backgrounds and interests **of** the students.

James Madison University is a good representation of a place with diversity.

Step 3: Find the action.

James Madison University ***is a good representation*** of a diverse place.

Step 4: Turn the lurking action into an active verb.

James Madison University ***is a good representation*** of a place with diversity.

represents

Step 5: After you have found the action, ask **who** or **what** is doing the action.

James Madison University represents a place with diversity.

Step 6: Write the action concisely.

James Madison University represents a diverse university.

