Conciseness and Clarity

Sources: Purdue OWL
owl.english.purdue.edu
What do we mean by Conciseness/Concision?

- Say what you mean and nothing more.
  No: I got the note you wrote yesterday.
  Yes: I got your note.

- Don’t be afraid of using active verbs.
  No: Tonight in class we experienced an evening of discussion about many important writing skills, including concision.
  Yes: Tonight we learned about concision.

- Fewer words can often help clarify a subject.
  No: The microscope consists of aberration lenses, 3 different lasers, which are suspended above the lenses which is housed in a chamber.
  Yes: The microscope consists of aberration lenses and 3 different lasers. Each laser is suspended above the lens in a chamber.
The politician talked about several of the merits of after-school programs in his speech.

The politician touted after school programs in his speech.
Interrogate Every Word

• Does this need to be here?

• Is it providing new information?

• Is it providing vital information?

• Is there a better word for this?
Combine sentences

• Jenn is currently teaching astrophysics at Stanford. She has been teaching there for three years.

Jenn has been teaching astrophysics at Stanford for three years.
Omit Needless Words!

• Consider your audience. What do they already know?

• Be logical and reasonable:
  – Eliminate useless phrases like, “It goes without saying,” and “I thought to myself.”
Omit More Needless Words!

• Eliminate unnecessary modifiers.
  – Kind of
  – Sort of
  – Type of
  – Really, basically
  – Definitely, actually, generally
  – Individual, specific, particular
  – For all intents and purposes
Change Passive into Active Verbs

- **BE VERB**: A surge of power was responsible for the destruction of the coolant pumps.
- **PASSIVE**: The coolant pumps were destroyed by a surge of power.
- **ACTIVE**: A surge of power destroyed the coolant pumps.
Stop wordiness!

• Avoid overusing noun forms of verbs:
  – The function of this widget is…
  – This widget…

• Avoid being indirect:
  – At this point in time, I…
  – Now, I…
Continue stopping wordiness!

• Eliminate these wordy phrases:
  – Use *because* instead of:
    • The reason for
    • For the reason that
    • Due to the fact that
    • In light of the fact that
    • Considering the fact that
    • On the grounds that
    • This why
Continue stopping wordiness!

• Eliminate these wordy phrases:
  – Use **When** instead of:
    • On the occasion of
    • In a situation in which
    • Under circumstances in which
  – Use **About** instead of:
    • As regards
    • In reference to
    • With regard to
    • Concerning the matter of
    • Where ______ is concerned
Continue stopping wordiness!

- Eliminate these wordy phrases:
  - Use **Must or Should** instead of:
    - It is crucial that
    - It is necessary that
    - There is a need/necessity for
    - It is important that
  - Use **Can** instead of:
    - Is able to
    - Has the opportunity to
    - Has the capacity for
    - Has the ability to
Continue stopping wordiness!

• Eliminate these wordy phrases:
  – Use **May, Might, or Could** instead of:
    • It is possible that
    • There is a chance that
    • It could happen that
    • The possibility exists for

  – These instructions and further information is available via The OWL at Purdue: Copyright 1995-2010. A link to the site is available on my instructor’s Web site.
Omit repetitive wording

- Past memories
- Various differences
- Each individual ________
- Basic fundamentals
- True facts
- Important essentials
- Future plans
- End result
- Unexpected surprise