

Dr. Karin Gosselink
Yale Center for Teaching and Learning

Grammar & Style: Concision

(Adapted from Joseph Williams' and Joseph Bizup's
Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace, 5th ed.
"Lesson 7: Concision")

Williams' Principles of Concision

- #1: Delete words that mean little or nothing
- #2: Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words.
- #3: Delete words implied by other words.
- #4: Replace a phrase with a word.
- #5: Change negatives to affirmatives.

In addition, Williams warns against using too much *metadiscourse*: language that refers to the writer's intentions (*to sum up, I believe*), directions to the reader (*note that, consider now*), or the structure of the text (*first, second, therefore, however*). While all of these words and phrases can be occasionally helpful, deploying too many of these phrases can clutter your sentences.

Finally, Williams gives advice on hedges and intensifiers, words that indicate the writer's certainty about a claim. Too many hedges make the audience doubt the writer's confidence in the claim; hedges include words like *usually, often, sometimes, almost, perhaps, many, might, seems, appears*. A claim that is too strongly worded (ex. "I prove that my argument is right") repels readers because of the arrogance and overconfidence it conveys. In making claims for academic essays, try to reach a balance that indicates that the claim is strong for that particular situation (but not every situation) but leaves room for further discussion.

Practice: Below are sample sentences that could be improved by revising for concision. Write new versions of these sentences.

Although immediate aid is undeniably important, long-term structural change is ultimately a larger priority because it can prevent the need for immediate aid in the first place and contributes to a better functioning global society in the long run, creating the greatest outcome for the greatest number.

While the whole issue of intervening and implementing long run benefiting projects could be a matter of complexity, it is not entirely impossible to do so if the intervening country had more of a strategic plan for the long run and was more concerned about benefiting the suffering country than its own interests and political benefit.