

Reducing Wordiness

adapted from [this](#) site

poetry lines taken from *Incarnadine*, Mary Szybist

As you read the following list, consider which patterns are typical of your writing:

A. Omit the filler phrases "it is," "there is," and "there are" at the beginning of sentences; these often delay the sentence's true subject and verb.

Wordy

- It is happy to attend birthday parties.

Concise

- Attending birthday parties brings happiness.

B. Change "which" or "that" constructions to an "-ing" word.

Wordy

- Here I am, with the syllables of your name that I've bathed in.

Concise

- Here I am, having bathed carefully in the syllables of your name.

C. Omit "which" or "that" altogether when possible.

Wordy

- Above you, museum windows which gleam October

Concise

- Above you, museum windows gleam October.

D. Replace passive verbs with active verbs. In passive constructions, the subject of the sentence is being acted upon; in active constructions, the subject is the actor.

Wordy

- Ravens were never seen by the ravens--just heard their deep caw, caw circling.

Concise

- The men never saw the ravens--just hear their deep cae, caw, circling.

Change "is" or "was" when they occur alone to a strong verb.

Wordy

- The most interesting thing to her are clouds.

Concise

- Clouds interest her.

Replace "is," "are," "was," "were," or "have + an -ing word" to a simple present or past tense verb.

Wordy

- Two birds are flapping their wings without leaving their branches.

Concise

- Two birds flap their wings without leaving their branches.

Replace "should," "would," or "could" with strong verbs.

Wordy

- You could hear faint sounds
like walnuts being dropped by crows onto the street,
almost a brush of a windchime from the porch---

Concise

- **Faint sounds**
like walnuts dropped by crows onto the street,
brushed my senses like a windchime from the porch---

Substitute strong verbs for "-tion" and "-sion" words whenever possible.

Wordy

- I had the happy idea for suspension of some blue globes in the air.

Concise

- **I had the happy idea to suspend some blue globes in the air.**

Replace prepositional phrases with one-word modifiers when possible, or rewrite the sentence to get rid of them. Prepositional phrases, those little relationship words like "of," "from," "after," "on," etc., tend to bring in a lot of "-tion" and "-sion" words too.

Wordy

- I had the happy idea of polishing the reflecting glass and say hello to my own blue soul. Hello, blue soul. Hello.
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Concise

- **I had the happy idea to polish the reflecting glass and say hello to my own blue soul. Hello, blue soul. Hello.**

Try cutting the obvious, the words that tell. Replace them with words that show. If the direction or location of something is already clear through the word choice, leave the location word out.

Wordy

- In her blue dress, she's just a bit of that sky,
just a blank bit
fallen down into the meadow.

Concise

- In her blue dress, she's just a bit of that sky,
just a blank bit
fallen into the meadow.

Combine two closely related short sentences by omitting part of one.

Wordy

- She yawns. Her silver bracelets click.

Concise

- She yawns, silver bracelets clicking.

Get rid of the word "of" if the sentence can make sense without it.

Wordy

- The high roofed building reeked with the stench
of tuna oil.

Concise

- The high roofed building reeked with tuna oil's stench.

Get rid of the word "the" if it's not essential to meaning.

Wordy:

It advances,
Like a marching army,
Over the small markets,
And over **the** battered houses.

Concise

It advances,
Like a marching army,
Over small markets and battered houses.

PRACTICE SENTENCES

Would you like to give it a try? Check out these sentences and try to reduce the word count.

1.

This was before
they had tasted hot sauce, though,
so, perhaps the motivation there
was pudding

2.

Let the soft pearl of clouds embrace you.

3.

I ask for someone to be with. She invites me to play with her friends,
the dolphins.

4.

**The salty scent of cooking pork wandered from the open door
onto the winter sidewalk.**

5.

I am like the wind that whistles through the clouds,
and which searches for something warm to curl around.

6.

11:15 on a Friday night
And the wind pounds
On the window pane
And I'm pacing 'round the living room
And the wind howls
Owoo, owoo, owoo, owoo

7.

The rich aroma
Chinese cooked seafood
Filters out windows
And covers the landscape
Like fog that is enveloping the countryside.

8.

A blue jay soars high up in the sky.

9.

The kettle hisses in the kitchen.

10.

The sky is hazel
dark sandy-thirsting
Grey-blue

winding, swirling,
dazzling and pounding
in the deadline of
December.

Many of the above practice ideas are from [this](#) site

