

Cutting And Polishing

See first the [slides on editing](#). Here are some more “quick and dirty” tips to cutting down your word count and simplifying your writing.

Recognize and cut filler words

Just

“Just like middle-class kids, working-class kids...”

“Like middle-class kids, working-class kids...”

Ever so

“He ate the apple ever so slowly.”

“He ate the apple slowly.”

Seem/like/appear

“She seemed like she was apparently frustrated.”

“She seemed frustrated.”

Even better: “She was frustrated.” (Was she or wasn’t she? Stand by your claims!)

Really/very

Find every instance of “really” or “very,” and it can probably be cut.

“The stick-up kids live very precarious lives.”

“The stick-up kids live precarious lives.” (Or, better, “the stick-up kids live precariously.”)

If “really” or “very” seems important to include, often the resolution lies in word choice.

“She was really, very, angry.”

“She was livid.”

Kind of/sort of/somewhat

Is it or isn’t it?

Of/at

Typically eliminating “of” or “at” is about rearranging the words to make sentences shorter and punchier.

“He wrote a biography of Julia’s life in 2011.”

“He wrote Julia’s biography in 2011.”

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"A diagnosis of heart disease was given..."

"Heart disease was diagnosed ..."

Began/start

Usually, we don't actually begin or start doing a thing. We do it.

"The organization began opening their clinic in 1999."

"The organization opened their clinic in 1999."

"She will start trying to study for the exams in March."

"She will try to study for her exams in March."

Of course there are appropriate ways to use begin/start. Like starting a car.

Back/Up/Down

Often -- but not always -- "back," "up," and "down" are unnecessary words. Carefully remove them if they are not helping the sentence.

"She repeated back."

"She repeated."

"He stood up against the wall."

"He stood against the wall."

That, in which, would

"That," "would," and "in which" are other words that can frequently be removed.

"Statements like this would make one think that Google wouldn't have any hiring discrimination and that they would appreciate diversity." (20 words)

"Statements like this would make one think Google wouldn't have any hiring discrimination and would appreciate diversity." (17 words)

Even better. "**Such** statements ~~like this would make one think~~ **imply** Google appreciates diversity and wouldn't ~~have any~~ practice hiring discrimination. ~~and would~~" (11 words)

"Laura Hamilton attempts to understand the ways in which college women deal with gender, femininity, and homophobia."

"Laura Hamilton attempts to understand the ways college women deal with gender, femininity, and homophobia."

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Cut adjectives

“The big, round, orange, ball bounced off the floor.”

“The basketball bounced off the floor.”

Sometimes a basketball is just a basketball. Saying so can be more descriptive than a list of descriptive (typically, redundant) words.

Cut “to be” verbs

“The contest will be starting at 5 PM.”

“The contest starts at 5 PM.”

“Five hundred people were in attendance.”

“Five hundred people attended.”

Rewriting passive voice - “was”

While passive voice can *sometimes* be used to indicate certain emotions or shift the subject (actor, grammatically) toward structural processes, more often it just makes our writing burdensome for the reader.

“The school was enshrouded in darkness.”

“Darkness enshrouded the school.”

“The door was opened by an elderly woman”

“An elderly woman opened the door”

Eliminate unnecessary information

Check whether you can get rid of sentences -- usually in the introduction -- that contain obvious information, or those that do not really provide any useful information but instead a shallow moral assessment. Trust your reader! For example:

“AIDS is a life-threatening disease.”

“Sexual violence is a big problem for women.”

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“Gang life is hard.”

You do more for your reader, and your argument, by focusing on the effects, prevalence, or other information related to a phenomenon.