



# Avoiding Wordiness

Department of  
Scientific  
Publications

Don Norwood

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS  
MDAnderson  
~~Cancer~~ Center

Making Cancer History®

# A history lesson

“Such preparations shall be made as will completely obscure all Federal buildings and non-Federal buildings occupied by the Federal government during an air raid for any period of time from visibility by reason of internal or external illumination.”

# A history lesson

“Tell them that in buildings where they have to keep the work going to put something across the windows.”

# Why is wordiness a problem?

- Confuses and/or frustrates the reader
- Causes ambiguity
- Increases word counts

Wordiness = clutter



# Types of wordiness

- Unnecessary words
- Confusing phrase and sentence constructions
- Excessive repetition
- Pompous language
- Meaningless jargon

# Ways to avoid wordiness

- Remove unnecessary words
- Use active, not passive, voice when appropriate
- Minimize repetition
- Avoid pompous language and meaningless jargon

# Remove unnecessary words

Original: Although some controversies exist, it seems to be clear that there is a subset of patients who do benefit from intensive induction chemotherapy. (23 words)

Revised: Although controversies exist, some patients seem to benefit from intensive induction chemotherapy. (12 words)



# Remove unnecessary words

Original: Strong formal proof of this hypothesis has not been published at this time. (13 words)

Revised: Proof of this hypothesis has not been published. (8 words)

# Remove unnecessary words

Original: There have been several epidemiologic studies that have shown a drastic decrease in the mortality of liver cancer in second-generation versus first-generation Japanese immigrants. (24 words)

Revised: Several epidemiologic studies have shown a drastic decrease in the mortality of liver cancer in second-generation versus first-generation Japanese immigrants. (20 words)

# Remove unnecessary words

At the present time → Now

A considerable number of → Many

A majority of → Most

Give rise to → Cause

In close proximity to → Near

# Remove unnecessary words

In order to → To

It is often the case that → Often

Accurately delineate → Delineate

Specifically excluded → Excluded

# Remove unnecessary words

Original: Human tumor tissue specimens obtained from prostate cancer patients (9 words)

Revised: Tumor specimens from prostate cancer patients (6 words)

# Remove unnecessary words

Original: The animal facility has accommodations for up to 500 mice. (10 words)

Revised: The animal facility holds up to 500 mice. (8 words)

# Remove unnecessary words

Original: The physicians' decision was to perform immediate treatment administration. (9 words)

Revised: The physicians decided to immediately administer treatment. (7 words)

# Use active voice

Passive: Mistakes were made when I created the plan.

Active: I made mistakes when I created the plan.



# Use active voice

Original: The results demonstrating common p53 expression were presented by the researchers. (11 words)

Revised: The researchers presented results demonstrating common p53 expression. (8 words)

# Use active voice

Original: The WBC count and LDH level were shown to be different in the two patient groups in our study. (19 words)

Revised: We showed that the WBC count and LDH level were different in the two patient groups. (16 words)

# Use active voice

Original: If the patients did not pass this evaluation, low-intensity therapy, such as low-dose cytarabine or demethylating agents, was offered to them. (21 words)

Revised: If the patients did not pass this evaluation, we offered them low-intensity therapy, such as low-dose cytarabine or demethylating agents. (20 words)

# Minimize repetition

Original: We measured MAPK expression, ERK expression, PI3K expression, and MEK expression. (11 words)

Revised: We measured the expression of MAPK, ERK, PI3K, and MEK. (10 words)

# Minimize repetition

Original: The mice exhibited resistance to the treatment. The mice also had short overall survival durations. (15 words)

Revised: The mice exhibited treatment resistance and had short overall survival durations. (11 words)

# Minimize repetition

Original: Twenty patients had high HDL levels, 14 patients had normal HDL levels, and 8 patients had low HDL levels. (19 words)

Revised: Twenty patients had high HDL levels, 14 had normal levels, and 8 had low levels. (15 words)

# Avoid pompous language

Original: Trainees are given enhanced decision participation in key areas of our murine-based studies. (13 words)

Revised: Trainees can make key decisions in our mouse studies. (9 words)

# Avoid pompous language

Original: The researchers are considering participating in the performance of numerous trials. (11 words)

Revised: The researchers are considering performing numerous trials. (7 words)



# Eliminate meaningless jargon

Original: Many physicians utilize this methodology in the clinical setting. (9 words)

Revised: Many physicians use this method clinically. (6 words)

# Eliminate meaningless jargon

Original: We are examining breast cancer tumorigenesis. (6 words)

Revised: We are examining breast tumorigenesis. (5 words)

# Tips

1. Care about the words that are used
2. Imitate writers in high-impact journals
3. Read troublesome passages out loud
4. Use dictionaries and *Roget's Thesaurus*

# Food for thought

“Anything that goes wrong will always be wordier than anything that goes right.”

Sir Harold Evans

# Resources

Evans H. *Do I Make Myself Clear? Why Writing Well Matters*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company; 2017.

Zinsser W. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. New York, NY: HarperCollins; 2001.

# Scientific Publications

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- E-mail:  
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