

How to Edit your Manuscript for Brevity.

This information accompanies my YouTube-Video: <https://youtu.be/JoGNgFkMU4w>

Word or character limits are there for a reason. The journals want to nudge the authors to keep it concise. So far, we paid attention to which information goes into your text; ensuring that there is no unnecessary and distracting information.

But conciseness also lies within wording. So, we also look at sentences, phrases and words to free your text from noise that is obscuring the information you want to convey.

Quick disclaimer that applies to all my videos:

I am not sharing completely novel information with you. You will probably find the same recommendations in any book, video, podcast, webinar, online course, or workshop on academic writing. This is also why I'm not giving you specific sources.

I pass on the knowledge in my own words and with my own understanding. And I curate for recommendations that helped me, personally, become a better writer, and that concur with my own realizations from my writing.

But, this time I included some examples that I took directly from the "Guidelines for Authors and Editors" by the [European Association of Science Editors \(EASE\)](#), in particular the section on empty words and phrases by Ed Hull.

1. Remove Repetitions:

Phrases such as "in other words" often indicate that you explained something in a complicated way and now you're going to say it in a clear way. You may want to drop the complicated way of saying it. When you start searching for synonyms, because you don't want to repeat the same word over and over, that is also a sign that you might be repeating the same information over and over.

2. Check your jargon:

Your audience is not looking for a vocabulary exam, so you may want to go easy on technical terms.

Common technical terms such as “desoxyribonucleic acid”, better known abbreviated as “DNA”, can be used without explanation. On the other hand, technical terms that researchers from a different field may not know but are essential to your study should be used and introduced. But, technical terms unknown to your target audience that only occur once or twice in your text may be completely superfluous.

3. Unnecessary and wordy phrases

A lot of phrases common in academic writing are fluff. They don't add to the content and can either be removed without a substitute, or replaced by one simple word. Here are some examples - there are many more, keep an eye out for similar phrases in your own texts.

ORIGINAL: ***Birds were previously shown to use optic flow for orientation during flight (Ref).***

EDITED: *Birds use optic flow for orientation during flight (Ref).*

Here, two unnecessary phrases are put together: “*previously*” is an empty word that doesn't add anything, and so is the common phrase “*was/were shown*”.

Additional Comment: If you are referring to your own research, you can start the sentence with “we have shown”.

Similarly, the phrase “***as is well known***” does not add any information that can't be inferred from the existenz of references. Phrases such as “***it is of interest to note that***” or “***it should be emphasized that***” are also superfluous, since - hopefully - all information in your text is there because it is of interest and should be emphasized. Emphasis can also be granted with other means, which we should talk about in another episode.

ORIGINAL: ***What Kinds of Natural Processes can be Regarded as Computations?***

EDITED: *Which Natural Processes are Computations?*

“*What*” is considered informal, so as the chapter title in a textbook, “*which*” should be preferred. But it's grammatically not wrong to use “*what*”. The question, about *Kinds of Natural Processes* is included in the question about Natural Processes. So the meaning doesn't change when you remove “*Kinds of*” from the question. And finally, “*can be regarded as*” means “*is*”.

ORIGINAL: ***However it should be emphasized that nominal responsibility is not necessarily indicative of time devoted to training.***

EDITED: *But, nominal responsibility does not indicate time devoted to training.*

“However” is synonymous with “but” - and “but” is shorter. “It should be emphasized” is an unnecessary phrase, because you wouldn’t mention something that wasn’t worth emphasizing. “Not necessarily is” means “is not”, but “is” is a weak verb. You want to use stronger verbs. Fortunately “is indicative of” can be turned into “indicates!”

4. Empty Words - Be specific!

Empty words have no clear meaning. Usually, sentences that use them are then followed by additional sentences for explanation, which means they can be easily replaced by more informative sentences.

For Example,

*It is “**Important**” that patients take their medicine.*

“Important” is a subjective term, and leaves open a lot of questions. Is it deadly or just an inconvenience not to take the medicine? What will happen if they don’t take it?

“Treated” in the sentence “*the patient was **treated** for X*” could refer to different drug therapies, or surgeries, or psychotherapies, etc. Be specific!

“*Patient reacted **well***” has the same problem. How exactly did the patient react? Be specific! Always prefer numbers over empty words.

Exercise

Here is a list of phrases which all can be replaced with the same word. Can you guess which?

accounted for by the fact that
due to the fact that
for the reason that
in view of the fact that