

# Cutting Sentence Length

Being concise, brief or succinct in your academic writing means using the least number of words to effectively convey an idea. Sentences that are 'wordy' can confuse your reader and are a problem for several reasons. They make your writing:

1. 'waffly' or empty of content
2. less convincing or clear
3. longer than it needs to be.

Clarity and length are important factors in any assignment, so it is advisable to eliminate 'wordiness', otherwise known as redundancy.

Consider these two sentences:

*Productivity actually depends on certain factors that basically involve psychology more than any particular technology.*

*Productivity depends more on psychology than on technology.*

Which is more concise?

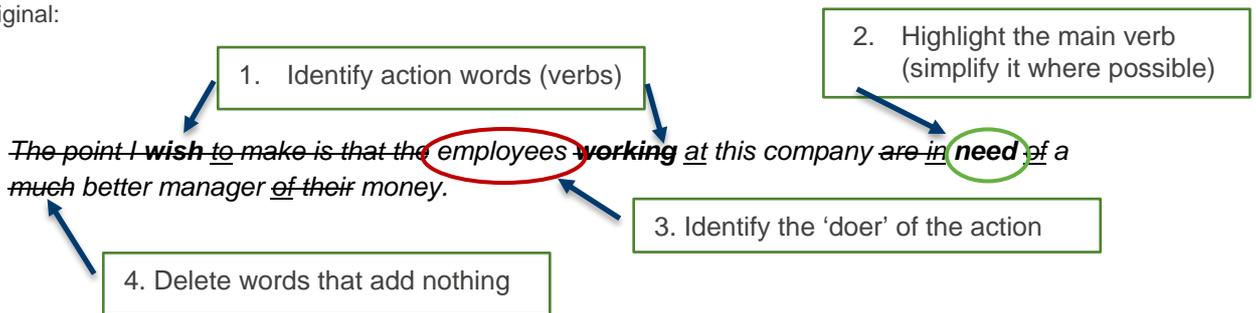
## How to reduce words

A good strategy to eliminate redundant words, or shorten 'wordy' sentences, is to use "The Paramedic Method" (Lanham, 2000). Start by identifying these elements in the sentence:

- Underline the prepositions (of, in, about, for, onto, into, between, as)
- Bold the verbs, i.e., the action words
- Ask where the 'action' is in the sentence
- Change the action into a simple main verb (e.g., "has been required" becomes "requires")
- Identify the 'doer' of the action - who's kicking whom
- Locate and delete any unnecessary wind-ups, e.g., introductory phrases that carry no meaning
- Identify and delete any words that add nothing (redundancy)

### Example 1

Original:



Improved:

~~Employees at this company need a better money manager.~~

## Example 2

In this example, splitting the statement into two sentences provides greater clarity.

Original:

*By applying the assumption, the interpretation of the cavity expansion scenario in the pressure meter tests can be described as two expansion models.*

1. Identify the main action word/s
2. Simplify it (describe)
3. Who's kicking who (doing the action)? (the expansion models)
4. Delete wind-ups and redundancy

Improved:

*The pressure meter tests describe two expansion models. This is based on the interpretation of the cavity expansion scenario.*

## Exercises

### Number 1

*The future of those engaged in studies at the postgraduate level, seeking advanced degrees from institutions of higher education, in regards to prospects for desirable employment in teaching positions at best does not have a high degree of certainty.*

1. Identify the main action word/s (does not have a high degree of certainty)
2. Simplify it (is/are [not])
3. Who's kicking who (doing the action)? (those currently undertaking a postgraduate qualification)
4. Delete wind-ups and redundancy

### Number 2

*Notwithstanding the fact that all legal restrictions on the use of firearms are the subject of heated debate and argument, it is necessary that the general public not stop carrying on discussing the pros and cons in regard to them.*

1. Identify the main action word/s (not stop carrying on discussing)
2. Simplify it (should discuss)
3. Who's kicking who (doing the action)? (the general public)
4. Delete wind-ups and redundancy

Adapted from: Lanham, R. A. (2000). *Revising Prose*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

### Answers

Number 1: Those currently undertaking a postgraduate qualification, and seeking a teaching career, are unlikely to get a job. OR: It is not certain that those currently undertaking a postgraduate qualification, and seeking a teaching career, will get a job. (passive form)

Number 2: The general public should discuss the pros and cons of firearms despite legal restrictions.

## Other helpsheets available

- Editing your Writing
- Sentence Structure