

## Writing Concisely

When a sentence has unnecessary words, it may not be perfectly understood. Let's look at some rules that will help you create clear, concise sentences.

### Rule 1: Avoid expressing the same idea twice.

Sometimes, a writer accidentally expresses the same idea twice. This is called being **redundant**. See the sentence below:

Not concise: *It will happen at twelve midnight.*

Since we know that midnight happens at twelve, the word *twelve* is unnecessary; it also makes the sentence longer. See the correction below:

Concise: *It will happen at midnight.*

Here is a list of some redundant phrases, along with the concise version of each phrase:

Redundant Phrase	Concise Word/Phrase
end result	result
each and every	each
free gift	gift
in the event that	if
personal opinion	opinion
revert back	revert
exactly the same	the same

### Rule 2: Avoid weak modifiers.

Your writing will be more concise if you avoid weak modifying words. See the example below:

Weak: *Joseph ate a really spicy sandwich.*

Better: *Joseph ate a spicy sandwich.*

Notice that *really* did not change type of sandwich that Joseph ate. The sentence has the same meaning when *really* is removed. However, the type of sandwich could be better described by providing more detail. See the example below:

More descriptive: *Joseph ate a spicy, hot pepper sandwich.*

Here are some common weak modifiers to avoid: *really, very, severely, quite, extremely*

### **Rule 3: Avoid “filler” words.**

Sometimes we use words in our sentences that do not add meaning, called “**filler words.**” They “fill in” a sentence, but they do not make it better.

We use filler words when we speak out loud, but in writing, they make our ideas less concise. See the two sentences below:

*She failed the test.*

*She totally failed the test.*

In the second sentence, the word *totally* was added. Does it provide additional ideas or make the sentence stronger? No. Thus, it is an unnecessary filler word.

Here are a few of the many filler words/phrases to avoid: *commonly, basically, slightly, only, just, maybe, absolutely, actually, kind of, seemed*

### **Rule 4: Avoid phrases that do not add meaning.**

Sometimes we use a phrase to make a sentence seem professional, but instead, it makes the sentence long and boring. See the following example:

*At the present time, Rachel works night shift.*

Does the phrase “*at the present time*” add meaning to the sentence? No. If Rachel works night shift, then it is happening now and the phrase is unnecessary.

Here are some meaningless phrases to avoid: *all things considered, due to the fact that, for the most part, in the event that, what I mean to say is, it seems that, as a matter of fact*

### **Rule 5: Avoid phrases that distract from the main message of the sentence.**

Occasionally, we start sentences with phrases that take focus away from the main message. See the example sentence below:

*There are three kittens that need medical care.*

The phrase, *there are*, distracts from the focus of the sentence, which is the subject: *kittens*, and the verb (action) phrase: *need medical care*. The sentence would be more concise without the phrase, *there are*. See below:

*Three kittens need medical care.*

These distracting phrases, called **expletive phrases**, are: *it is, there is, and there are*