

## Editing for Wordiness

One good way to make your writing more energetic is to eliminate excess verbiage. Sometimes we overload our sentences with unnecessary words and phrases, perhaps because we have come to believe that "more is better" (in writing as in action films!). More often than not, however, the better sentence—regardless of how long or short (or complex or simple)—is the "economical" sentence, the sentence in which *every word counts*. Economical writing (especially with essays and other academic prose) has the advantage of clarity and conciseness, two qualities of good writing.

To eliminate wordiness, learn to spot the following:

- word or phrase repetition
- use of two similar words or phrases whose meanings are essentially the same
- long conjunctive phrases (*in spite of the fact that*) for which a shorter phrase (*even though*) will serve
- long modifying phrases (the trail *which is circular*) for which a single adjective will serve (*circular* trail)
- generally, any "unnecessary" language

Examples:

even though

**The Wilsons moved into the house ~~in spite of the fact that~~ the back door ~~on the rear of the~~ house was only ten yards away from the train tracks.**

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**In my opinion, Bloom's race for the governorship is a futile exercise.**

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**~~If there are any new fares, then they must be reported by message to all of our~~ transportation**

**offices.**

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to communicate

**~~The thing~~ data sets are used for ~~is communicating~~ with other computers.**

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The following exercise will help you learn to revise your writing for wordiness.

## **Worksheet: Editing for Wordiness**

*Directions: Edit the following paragraph for wordiness. In some cases, it might also be appropriate to combine sentences for more concise language.*

We examined the old house from top to bottom. In fact, we started in the attic, which was hot and dusty, and made our way down two flights of stairs, and down one more descent, which was a spiral staircase, into the basement. On our way back up, we thought we heard the eerie noise, the one that had startled us from our sound sleep in the first place. This time the noise was at the top of the staircase that led to the second-floor hallway. We froze and stood quietly at exactly the same moment, listening very intently. Finally, after a few moments, someone said, "Why don't we all go in together and see what it is?" Cautiously, with great care, we stepped over the threshold into the dark hallway, which disappeared into darkness in front of us. There was an unearthly emanating light shining from underneath the door that led into the kitchen. All at once we jumped when we heard a loud crashing sound from behind that door. Before we could rush into the kitchen at high speed, the light went out suddenly, and instantly we were in total pitch black darkness. I thought I heard someone's teeth chattering; then I realized with a shock that it was my own teeth I heard chattering. Without saying a word, we backed silently away from the kitchen—no one wanted to go in now. Then it was as if someone had shot off a gun, because before we realized what we were doing, we tore up the stairs as fast as we could, and we dove into our beds and pulled the covers up and over us to shut out any more frightening sounds and thoughts.