Eliminating Wordiness

Although adding words helps fill pages, information that doesn’t advance the paper cheapens the quality of the piece. Keeping your paper concise strengthens its clarity and gives it a smooth flow.

Here are some tips to help keep your writing to the point:

1. **Weak words**
   The written equivalent of “um.” Filler words don’t provide content, and they disrupt the flow of the sentence.

   **EX:** *Generally speaking,* students can *basically* use anything to do research.
   **REVISION:** Students can use anything to do research.

   **Examples:** *Kind of, actually, really, practically, generally,* etc.

2. **Repeated meanings and unneeded synonyms**
   Paired words may be redundant.

   **EX:** If her account is *true* and *accurate,* he was the one who stole it.
   **REVISION:** If her account is *true,* he was the one who stole it.

   **Examples:** *each & every, true & accurate, first & foremost, terrible tragedy, controversial issue, true facts,* etc.

3. **Phrases that can be replaced by single words**
   If you can think of one word to replace several, use it.

   **EX:** If I ever *come back* to visit, we can *think about* it.
   **REVISION:** If I ever return to visit, we can consider it.

4. **Monologue phrases**
   Injecting notes about structure, spurring audience reaction, or clarifying intent may interfere with your main point.

   **EX:** *As we have seen,* the statistics contribute to *what some may call* an issue.
   **REVISION:** The statistics contribute to the issue.

5. **Caginess**
   Lack of confidence in your writing can also lead to wordiness.
EX: *It is possible* this may be true.
REVISION: This may be true.

Examples: *It seems like, it is possible that, etc.*

6. **Nonessential information**
   If the information about *who, when, and where*, does not advance your point, it is unnecessary.

EX: When I took the class *in May of last year*, I received an A.
REVISION: When I took the class, I received an A.

7. **Change negatives to affirmatives**
   When possible, replace the negative phrase with one word. Think of antonyms for the word in the sentence. Your sentence will be much clearer.

EX: There are *not many* examples that are interesting.
REVISION: There are *few* examples that are interesting.

Examples: *not many=few, not stop=continue, not notice=overlook, not include=omit, not different=similar, not the same=different, not allow=prevent, etc.*

8. **Avoid beginning sentences with “it is,” “there is,” and “there are”**
   Avoid these phrases unless you are introducing a new topic in your sentence or emphasizing the idea following these phrases.

Note this improvement of the previous example:

EX: *There are* few examples that are interesting.
REVISION: Few examples are interesting.

9. **Avoid unnecessary or overuse of “be” verbs (am, is, are, was, were).**
   “Be” verbs are common but not always necessary. Delete them when possible to create a stronger and more direct sentence.

EX: The examples *are* interesting to me.
REVISION: The examples interest me.