



The Writing Center at



STETSON UNIVERSITY

Sentence Strength and Concision

When writers encounter problems getting points across or receive feedback that a paper has confusing content, wordiness or word choice is often to blame. Readers may be distracted, confused, or annoyed by writing habits that could be easily avoided. Exercising concision and recognizing bad writing habits will build sentence strength and clarity. Here are a few of this problem's leading causes and some easy solutions.

- **Passive voice** weakens a sentence in three ways:
 - It replaces a strong, active verb with a state-of-being verb, taking that action's ownership away from a real subject or object.
 - It often places the subject at the end of the sentence.
 - Expressing your concept requires more words than necessary.

For example: There are many painful effects with alligator bites.

Instead: Alligator bites cause pain.

- **Prepositional phrases** often indicate patterns of problem writing:
 - Like passive voice, they may displace the subject.
 - They often displace ownership of a property or concept.
 - They can result in wordiness or confusing sentences.

For example: The meaning of this sentence of mine ends up obscured by the wordiness of it.

Instead: My sentence's meaning is obscured by wordiness.

- **Idioms** that may distract, confuse, or annoy your reader fall into three categories:
 - **Clichés** are phrases that have lost meaning through overuse.
 - **Colloquialisms** are phrases of specific regional origin that may not make sense to a broad audience
 - **Stock Phrases** are words that we mistakenly believe make our writing sound more sophisticated, but are superfluous and often wordy.

For example: Due to the fact that society today thinks that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the best thing since sliced bread, a ton of his other works are left high and dry.

Instead: Due to the current popularity of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, many of his other works are overlooked.