

Writing Center Handouts

Sentence Strength and Concise Writing

If your paper is confusing or hard to read, wordiness may be to blame. It is important to remain focused, clear, and concise to improve your sentence strength. Practicing concise writing will also help your reader to understand your paper.

Common Issues and Solutions

- Passive voice weakens a sentence in three ways:
 - It replaces a strong, active verb with a weaker state-of-being verb.
 - It often places the subject at the end of the sentence.
 - A passive voice requires more words than necessary.

For example: There are many painful effects associated with alligator bites. Instead: Alligator bites cause pain.

- Prepositional phrases often indicate patterns of problematic 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.