

Concision, or Getting to the Point

When speaking aloud, we often use filler words or phrases to supplement the material we are saying, either to create a certain tone or just give ourselves more time to think. While verbal communication expects these occasional “ums,” “uhs,” and “yeahs,” written communication forgoes these types of unnecessary phrases. In editing, the process of removing unnecessary words or phrases is known as concision. Concision is an important part of writing as it streamlines communication, makes your points clearer, and improves your tone by making it more professional. This handout will explore some aspects of concision, why they are important, and how to incorporate them into your own writing.

Economy of Words

When discussing what is and is not concise, it often helps to think about creating a budget for words. Depending on what you are talking about, say a summary section versus an analysis section, each sentence will have a different word budget that could be used.

By reviewing certain sections with this budget in mind, you can begin to identify what information and words are necessary in creating meaning in your sentences. By identifying what is necessary, the words and phrases that are *not* become more obvious. To begin the process of tightening up your writing, use the next section as a guide for what to look for.

Concision in Action

Active Voice: Is the sentence using active voice? Changing the voice from passive to active will give the reader a definite sense of who and what is important in the sentence.

Example:

Active: She opened the door.

Passive: The door was opened by her.

Removing Repetition: Are you over-repeating yourself within a paragraph or sentence? Eliminating unnecessarily repeated information will lead to a clearer presentation.

Example: “At many points in history, people have led revolutions against their governments throughout history.” vs. “At many points in history, people have led revolutions against their governments.”

Remove Unnecessary Modifying Clauses: Are your sentences full of adjective or prepositional phrases that do not communicate important details about your subject? Removing unnecessary details makes your writing more direct and easier to understand.

Example: “The book was really good at pulling the reader in.” vs. “The book was excellent at keeping reader engagement.”

Combining Sentences: Do you have two related sentences that could become one? Sometimes concision comes down to improving flow. By eliminating transition phrases

or repeated subjects, concision is improved because the reader is spending less time trying to work through punctuation and can instead, get to the point.

Example: “The book was about physics. It mentioned Isaac Newton.” vs. “The book was about physics, and mentioned Isaac Newton.”

Conclusion

Concision comes down to reducing the amount of confusing, obscuring, or unnecessary information in a paper that disrupts a reader’s understanding. It is all about being efficient and clear in presentation and starts with the question, *How do I deliver the pertinent information to my audience in the easiest way possible?* Concision is a great principle to keep in mind when editing because it keeps you in tune with your audience by forcing you to see the paper from a reader’s perspective instead of the writer’s.

That said, concision is not all-mighty. Sometimes you might find a phrase that should be removed because it breaks concision, but it stylistically matches the paper’s voice. And here is where a decision can be made. Do you make the sentence more concise, or is the sentence better served by the stylistic contribution of the phrase?

In the end, it comes down to you, the writer. But that’s the great thing about concision; it’s subjective.