

Aggie Grammar Guide: Concision

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Concision means cutting, so we must delete all unnecessary words while preserving the ideas.

Because academic writing often requires complex ideas, it's important to edit for concision so that the reader can digest your ideas instead of getting lost in too many words or confusing structures.

Concision can be especially helpful for assignments with a limited word count. Implement the following strategies to make every word count without sacrificing meaning.

Revision Strategies

Generally, writers must apply at least a few strategies before their sentences are concise. To model that, we'll apply a few strategies to one sentence in order to see how each step can change the sentence, making it more clear and concise without sacrificing meaning. Revising in steps, as we do below, can help you address the various problems associated with wordiness. You'll have to assess your own sentences to determine which steps are necessary.

Step one

Identify and cut *prepositions* and *prepositional phrases*. Although they are important tools for conveying complex ideas, too many prepositions can confuse your message and frustrate your reader. One way to discover wordiness is to underline all the prepositions. If you have more than 3 in a sentence, consider cutting prepositions and clarifying meaning. Reading sentences aloud can also draw attention to sentences with too many prepositions since you may stumble or get confused as you're reading if the sentence is too wordy. Common ways to cut prepositions include making the noun phrase after the preposition an adjective or making the noun possessive.

- **Example:** When I am considering about the language of my target destination of studying abroad, I think it will be very convenient if I go to a country which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (This sentence includes 37 words)
- **Revision:** When I **am considering the language** of my target **study abroad destination**, I think it will be very convenient if I go to a country which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (35 words)

Step two

Cut unnecessary information. Find any unnecessary information that, when cut, will not detract from the original sentence's meaning. Phrases like **I think** or **I believe** are not necessary to show your point because the reader knows anything that is not your idea/opinion will be cited.

- Example: When I am considering the language of my target study abroad destination, **I think** it will be **very** convenient if I go to a country which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (35 words)
- Revision: When I am considering the language of my target study abroad destination, **it will be convenient** if I go to a country which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (32 words)

Step three

Cut dummy subjects (subjects that aren't actually the doer of the action) like **it + to be** verb or **there + to be** verb.

- Example: When I am considering the language of my target study abroad destination, **it will be convenient** if I go to a country which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (32 words)
- Revision: When I am considering the language of my target study abroad destination, **I should decide** if I go to a country which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (31 words)

Step four

Exchange multi-word verbs with active *single word verbs*. Multi-word verbs are defined here as verbs that require more than one word to be complete including *passive voice*, *phrasal verbs* and other tenses that require helping verbs.

- Example: When I **am considering** the language of my target study abroad destination, I **should decide if I go to** a country which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (31 words)
- Revision: When I **consider** the language of my target study abroad destination, I should **choose** a country which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (26 words)

Step five

Make nouns possessive

- Example: When I consider the language of my target study abroad **destination**, I should choose a **country** which has English or Chinese Mandarin as its official language. (26 words)
- Revision: When I consider my target study abroad **destination's language**, I should choose a country **whose official language is** English or Chinese Mandarin. (The final revision includes 22 words. We deleted 15 words and made the sentence more clear and concise without losing meaning.)

Now, let's try a new sentence and apply different strategies to improve concision and clarity without sacrificing meaning.

Step one

Cut unnecessary introductory phrases like: **there was, in the beginning of time, for centuries, in today's society, I think, I believe, I feel, the point I want to make is, I want to talk about**, etc. If you think you may have an unnecessary introductory phrase, read the sentence without it and see if you lose an important part of your idea. If not, cut it! Present your thoughts/beliefs authoritatively, without attributing them to yourself directly.

- Example: **I believe that** the main reason why UT Austin keeps it confidential when it comes to the reason why the students are chosen is to keep them with a positive, open mind. (This sentence includes 32 words.)
- Revision: **The main reason** why UT Austin keeps it confidential when it comes to the reason why the students are chosen is to keep them with a positive, open mind. (29 words)

Step two

Cut unnecessary repetition. Sometimes, during drafting, writers include two words that mean the same thing. It's important to go back through the draft during editing to eliminate unnecessary repetition. That said, sometimes repetition is intentional or necessary because no other synonym exists. The reader should be able to see that the word or idea was repeated for emphasis.

- Example: The main **reason why** UT Austin **keeps it** confidential when **it** comes to the **reason why** the students are chosen is to **keep** them with a positive, open mind. (29 words)
- Revision: The main **reason** UT Austin **upholds confidentiality** when it comes to **why** the students are chosen is to keep them with a positive, open mind. (Note, "reason" and "why" mean the same thing, so we used each word once for variety.) (25 words)

- Example of intentional repetition: If a **positive** idea is conveyed, students are going to respond in a **positive** way. (Repeating the word “positive” enforces the point about the manner in which the “idea” is presented.)

Step three

Move and/or add ideas, words or phrases to clarify meaning. Sometimes the meaning gets lost in the structure, so we need to revise in order to clarify it.

- Example: The main reason UT Austin upholds confidentiality **when it comes to why the students are chosen is to keep them with a positive, open mind**. (25 words)
- Revision: The main reason UT Austin upholds confidentiality **about** why the students are chosen is to **help them maintain** a positive **attitude and** open mind. (We had to revise that last phrase quite a lot, but we clarified the point while preserving the idea. [The final revision includes 24 words. We deleted 8 words and clearly and concisely revised the sentence without losing meaning.])

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Intermediate Practice

Review the concision strategies and apply strategies that make the sentences more concise without losing meaning. After you rewrite the sentences, identify the new word counts in parentheses.

Please note, because concision deals with style more than grammar rules, there may be multiple concise revision options although you will see only one option in the answer key. Compare your revision to the one provided and determine if one is more effective. One way to do that is to determine which revision has fewer words but still maintains the original sentence's meaning.

Example: ***However, on the other hand, the series hybrid may require a larger and more complicated battery than other cars since the electric energy totally replaces gas power to propel the automobile.*** (31 words)

Revision: ***However, the series hybrid may require a larger and more complicated battery than other cars since the electric energy totally replaces gas power.*** (We cut repetition: “on the other hand,” which is wordy, and redundancy: “to propel the automobile.” Most readers know the car’s power propels it.) (23 words)

- 1) Paul Tough uses that quote in the article to be used as a transition from Vanessa’s story to the main topic of the article. (25 words)
- 2) Students who carry such negative thoughts often end up dropping out instead of seeking for help. (17 words)
- 3) Feeling like they don’t belong makes students vulnerable and more likely to not try as hard. (17 words)
- 4) The ingredient corn is one of the most used ingredients in the diets of Mexicans. (16 words)
- 5) For example, at some point in high school I heard from the grapevine that Christopher Columbus was not the true founder of the United States. (26 words)

- 6) Now that I know history from the perspectives of both the oppressors and the oppressed, I have become more knowledgeable to understand how the U.S. has gotten to be the racially and economically unequal country that it is today. (40 words)
- 7) I went to school, and there I learned how to read and write in English, but yet I feel as if I am not entirely entitled to be an American. (31 words)
- 8) Moreover, with a parallel hybrid car, it uses an internal combustion and electrical engine. (15 words)

Advanced Practice

Review the list of strategies, and revise each sentence or group of sentences to create the most concise revisions. After you rewrite the sentence, identify the new word count in parentheses. You will have to restructure and change words, but make sure you preserve the original meaning.

Please note, because concision deals with style more than grammar rules, there may be multiple concise revision options although you will see only one option in the answer key. Compare your revision to the one provided and determine if one is more effective. One way to do that is to determine which revision has fewer words but still maintains the original sentence's meaning.

Example: ***Most of the time, mothers tend to have a fear of their children being in a place where they don't fit and try to give other options, not knowing that at the same time it will be crushing their children's dreams. (41 words)***

Revision: ***Often, mothers fear their children being somewhere they won't fit in and try to provide other options, not realizing they're crushing their children's dreams. (24 words)***

- 1) The students, at some point, experience these thoughts leading to impacting in a negative way their life. (17 words)
- 2) The program is set up to help those students reach a higher level of education and with the extra help given to them without revealing the real reason behind it has an effective impact on those student's life. (38 words)
- 3) "Pre-med" students who ace in all of their classes think they are better than the other students who didn't ace in all of their classes because the "pre-med" students think that they are way smarter to be able to ace in all of their classes, unlike the students who didn't. (50 words)
- 4) In recent times, technology is presented almost seemingly everywhere. It seems as if the power of technology has taken over. The result of an increase of innovating technology has led individuals to read books through e-readers and tablets, instead of physical books. Although, reading from physical books is helpful, the advantages of using e-readers and tablets is much more helpful and meaningful than reading from a physical book. (68 words)

- 5) Further in the reading I come to learn that Santiago and her siblings were racially targeted because of their physical traits but inside of her she describes a white male within her that fought for justice because he knew that she belonged in the American society. (46 words)

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Answer Key

The following revisions show one way to practice concision. In reality, many options exist. The key is to cut and clarify while maintaining meaning.

Intermediate Practice

- 1) Tough **uses that quote to transition** from Vanessa's story to the **article's** main topic. (14 words)
- 2) Students who carry (or "Students carrying") such negative thoughts often drop out instead of **seeking help**. (12 or 13 words)
- 3) Feeling alone makes students vulnerable and **less likely to try** as hard. (12 words)
- 4) **Corn** is one of the most **common** ingredients in the **Mexican diet**. (12 words)
- 5) For example, **in high school I heard that** Christopher Columbus **did not discover** the United States. (16 words)
- 6) Knowing history from the oppressors' and the oppressed's perspectives, I **understand** how the U.S. has **become** the racially and economically unequal country that it is today. (26 words)
- 7) I went to school **and learned to read** and write in English, **yet I feel I am not** entirely entitled to be an American. (24 words)
- 8) Moreover, **a parallel hybrid car uses** an internal combustion and electrical engine. (12 words)

Advanced Practice

- 1) **When** students experience **them, these thoughts negatively impact their lives**. (10 words)
- 2) The program is **designed** to help those students **attain** a higher level of education **and provide extra help without revealing** the real reason, **which positively impacts students' lives**. (28 words)
- 3) "Pre-med" students **who ace all** their classes think **they are better and far smarter than other students**. (17 words)
- 4) **It seems like technology** has taken over. **Increased innovative** technology has **led to reading on** e-readers and tablets instead of physical books. Although **reading physical books** is helpful, using e-readers and tablets **is more effective**. (35 words)
- 5) **Later, I learned** that Santiago and her siblings were racially targeted, **despite** the white male **she imagines within her who fights for justice and her place** in American society. (28 words)