

Aggie Grammar Guide: Concision

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.

Sentence One

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.

Sentence Two

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.]