

Avoiding Redundancy

Redundancy occurs when a writer unnecessarily repeats something. Writers should avoid redundancy not only because it distracts and annoys readers but also because it adds unnecessary length to one's writing. Eliminating redundancy is a good way to revise your writing for **concision**, or the ability to make your point in as few words as needed.

Local redundancy

Redundancy can occur on a local or a global level. On the local level, redundancy takes the form of unnecessary words or phrases. Observe the redundancy in the following word pairs:

Evil villains

Dead corpses

Added bonus

Unexpected surprise

Hopeful optimism

Aren't all villains evil? Aren't all corpses dead? Aren't all bonuses added? Aren't all surprises unexpected? Isn't all optimism hopeful? In each of these word pairs, the writer need not use both words to express his or her meaning; therefore, it is more effective to eliminate the adjective and let the noun serve on its own.

These examples may seem obvious, but local redundancy occurs very often in academic writing, particularly when writers attempt to "fluff up" their writing with big words and added length. For example, read the following sentence:

At this point in time, it now becomes necessary for us to consider alternative possibilities for the purposes of our goals.

This sentence is wordy and unclear primarily because it is redundant; there are several words that could be deleted without affecting the meaning of the sentence. For instance, *at this point of time* and *now* mean the same thing, so the writer could save space by just using *now*:

It now becomes necessary for us to consider alternative possibilities for the purposes of our goals.

Next, why not simply write *alternatives* instead of *alternative possibilities*?

It now becomes necessary for us to consider alternatives for the purposes of our goals.

Next, what does *for the purposes of our goals* do for this sentence? Could it be eliminated from the sentence without changing the sentence's meaning? Aren't all alternatives considered for the purposes of one's goals?

It now becomes necessary for us to consider alternatives.

Next, the writer could make the subject *we* in order to eliminate the need for *for us*. Similarly, *becomes necessary* could be replaced with *need*:

We now need to consider alternatives.

By cleaning up redundancy, the writer has shortened this sentence from 21 words to just six words, all without changing the meaning of the sentence. The new sentence is clearer and easier to read.

Global redundancy

Global redundancy occurs when a writer repeats him or herself throughout the paper. For example, a writer may continuously bring up the same point over and over. While repetition can be effective in some cases, this “beating a dead horse” will quickly annoy readers and cause them to lose interest. Think about a time you lost interest in a speech or lecture. The speaker probably sounded dull and monotone, perhaps returning to the same tired ideas over and over. Redundant writing is like monotone speech: it lacks variety. Keep your readers interested in your writing by constantly giving them new words and new ideas to think about.

The best way to eliminate global redundancy is to read your own writing slowly and carefully. For each sentence you read, ask yourself these questions:

- Have I already said this somewhere earlier in my paper? If so, do I really need to say it again?
- Do my readers really need to know this in order to understand my meaning? If you find yourself doubting whether something is necessary, the answer is probably *no*.
- Could I rephrase this using fresh, new language? Is there a way to say the same thing in a different way?

If possible, have someone else read your writing with the same questions in mind. Use this reader’s feedback to revise your work for concision.