

Quick Tips for Concision and Clarity

Issue	Original	Revised for concision
Meta-Discourse	In this paper I argue that current educational trends fail to teach transfer because they fail to help . . .	Current educational trends fail to teach transfer because they fail to help . . .
Overusing “to be”	There is one key issue plaguing education today, and that is . . .	One key issue <i>plagues</i> education today: inequity.
Overusing prepositions	In this paragraph is a demonstration of the use of good style in the writing of a report paper. (From Lanham’s paramedic method.)	This paragraph <i>demonstrates</i> good style in report writing.
Unnecessary Nominalizations	This is a study that gives information to our discipline by . . .	This study <i>informs</i> our discipline by . . .
Doubled words	Each and every student deserves . . .	Each student deserves . . .
Redundant categories	Our sample is large in size	Our sample is large
Redundant modifiers	The hurricane was a terrible tragedy	The hurricane was a tragedy OR The hurricane was tragic OR the hurricane was terrible
Things we can infer	Imagine trying to learn the rules for playing the game of chess (from Williams).	Imagine learning the rules for chess. (“learn” implies “trying,” etc.)
Wordy phrases	In the event that you finish early . . .	If you finish early . . .
Wordy negatives	My parents are not the same.	My parents are <i>different</i> .
Unnecessary adverbs	I ran slowly . . .	I jogged . . .
Excessive hedging	These results may show that current educational theory might limit learning	These results may show that current educational theory <i>limits</i> learning
Issue / Principle	Original	Revised for clarity
Delayed point: get to the subject, verb, and object quickly. (Note: the “original” here is also quite wordy.)	Because of our efforts to fight inequality and marginalization, including but not limited to creating resources and trainings to expose gaps where we can treat each other better, not to mention establishing a supportive environment where all feel welcome, we’ve improved company morale.	We’ve improved company morale through our efforts to fight inequality . . .
Avoid unnecessary abstractions	The reception of your missive induced not an <i>abject</i> but an <i>object</i> , an <i>objet petit a</i> within which I become a transcending whole.	Getting your letter helped me to ‘find myself.’
Make important actions verbs	There was an affirmative decision for expansion	The director <i>decided</i> to <i>expand</i> the program (from Williams)
Cohesion: make sure your sentences ‘cohere,’ which means information flows from “old	Educational theory shows that transfer of learning rarely happens.	Educational theory shows that transfer of learning rarely happens.

<p>information” to “new information.”</p>	<p>The act of bridging information from old contexts to new ones is what makes transfer possible, however.</p> <p>Note: In this example, we assume our readers understand what educational theory is but don’t know that transfer rarely happens. Once we’ve introduced information in a sentence, that information now becomes “old” in subsequent sentences.</p>	<p>However, transfer is possible when we bridge information from old contexts to new ones.</p> <p>Note: here, repeating “transfer” helps the sentences cohere. “Transfer” was the new info in the first sentence but now acts as the old info in the second sentence. Putting the old info first helps bridge from sentence to sentence.</p> <p>Note 2: It’s not about repeating words—doing so too often can make your writing choppy and redundant. It’s about linking old information (words and ideas) to new.</p>
<p>Coherence: paragraphs contain only one or two strings of information</p>	<p>Consistent ideas toward the beginnings of sentences, especially in their subjects, help readers understand what a passage is generally about. A sense of coherence arises when a sequence of topics comprises a narrow set of related ideas. But the context of his sentences lost by seemingly random shifts of topics. Unfocused paragraphs result when that happens (from Williams).</p>	<p>Readers understand what the passage is generally about when they see consistent ideas for the beginning of sentences, especially in their subjects. They feel the passage is coherent when they read a sequence of topics that focuses on a narrow set of related ideas. But when topics seem to shift randomly, readers lose the context of a sentence. When that happens, they feel they are reading paragraphs that are unfocused and even disorganized</p>

Williams, Joseph, and Joseph Bizup. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*.