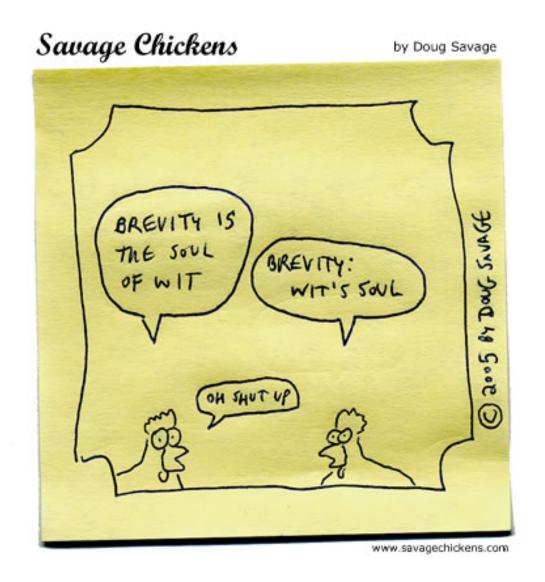
Brevity



Two ways to be brief

- (1) Reduce content
 - Stick to your story
- (2) Use fewer and shorter words
 - After you write (self-revision)
 - Make every character of text justify its existence
- Can you be too brief?
 - Yes, although it's an uncommon problem.
 - What matters most is brevity of reading: if cutting more words makes the reader's job harder, then don't.

L13: Brevity

Text-bulgers to watch for (1)

- Passive voice
- Nominalizations ("achieve a reduction in length" vs. "reduce length")
- Long words ("utilize" vs. "use")
- Roundabout phrases ("the majority of" vs. "most")
- Tautologous modifiers ("blue in colour" vs. "blue")
- Empty modifiers ("quite strong" vs. "strong")
- Padding phrases ("in this study we" vs. "we")

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"needless to say"

"for all intents and purposes"

"a number of"

"relatively"

"in those instances when"

"basically"
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Text-bulgers to watch for (2)

- Redundancy
 - Keep each paragraph to its topic
 - Don't repeat Methods in Results, Results in Discussion, etc.
 (reminders are good; wholesale repetition is not)
 - Don't present the same material in text, table, and figure (text should summarize pattern, not repeat it)

L13: Brevity

Text-bulgers to watch for (3)

Excessive hedging

"(Observation) could reasonably be assumed to possibly occur by chance"

Excessive metadiscourse

"We believe that our results establish that..."

"As we established in the previous paragraph..."

"The objective of my study was to..."

"Consider the following examples..."

• Excessive parentheticals

"Parenthetical": phrase that interrupts an otherwise complete sentence (or sentence interrupting an otherwise complete paragraph); may be in parentheses, set off by commas or dashes, in a footnote, etc.

"Studies like ours (which are common in the literature) generally establish that..."

How much should you aim to shorten?

- Only you can know how wordy you are!
- My own first drafts can almost always be cut 20%. Then that second draft can usually be cut by 20% more.
- Stop when further shortening makes reading harder.

L13: Brevity

Today's workshop

Bloat and cut

- Each group will be given a short excerpt from a paper. Revise to make it as unnecessarily *long* as possible.
- Each group will be given a longer excerpt from a draft manuscript. Revise to make it as *concise* as possible.