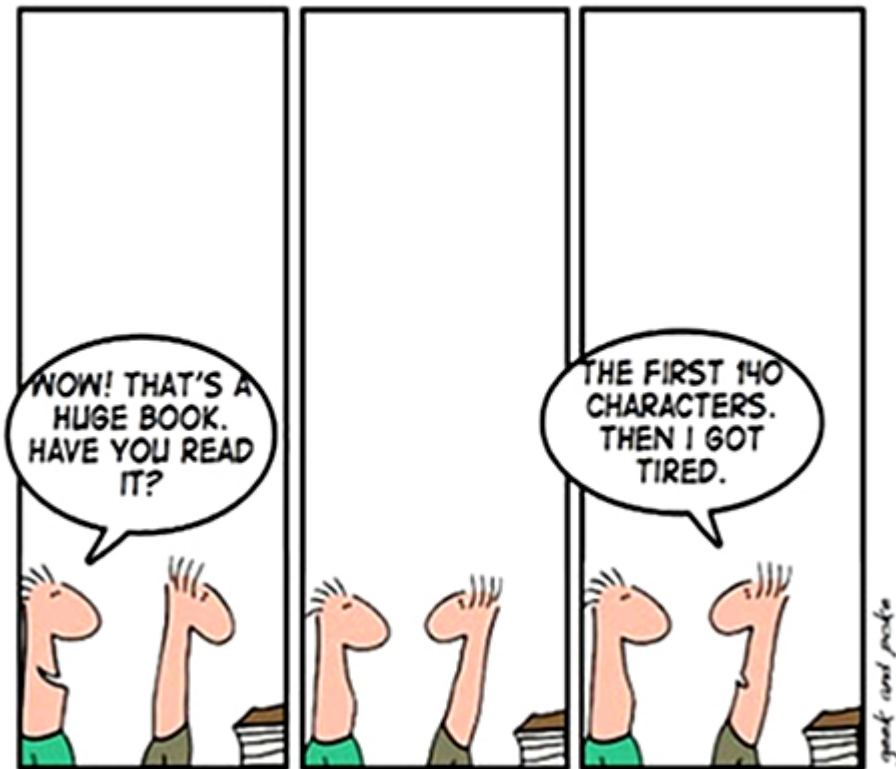


Eight Steps to More Concise Writing



You know you must streamline your writing, but the devil's in the details. Here are some specifics about what to look for:

1. Remove redundancy

Avoid double-teaming terms like “a period of one week,” “end result,” “free gift,” and “personal opinion.” Watch for phrases that echo the quality in question: “oval in shape,” “larger in size,” “shorter in duration,” and the like. Omit redundant words that are already implied as part of an abbreviated term, such as *machine* in “ATM machine.”

2. Reduce phrases to words

Replace a descriptive phrase following a noun with a one-word adjective that precedes the noun. For example, “People who are experienced at traveling know better than to label their luggage,” can be revised to, “Experienced travelers know better than to label their luggage.”

A modifying phrase, similarly, can be reduced to a simple adverb. For instance, “Sympathizing with her concerns, he nodded in response to her complaint,” is more concisely expressed as, “He nodded sympathetically in response to her complaint.”

Delete extraneous phrases such as “which is” and “who were,” as shown here: “We drove down Lombard Street, which is considered the most crooked street in the world” is easily simplified to, “We drove down Lombard Street, considered the most crooked street in the world.”

3. Omit gratuitous intensifiers and qualifiers

Use sparingly those adverbs that intensify or qualify. “They had an extremely unpleasant experience” isn’t accurate unless a subsequent explanation justifies the intensifier *extremely*, and “I was somewhat taken aback” isn’t necessarily an improvement on “I was taken aback.”

4. Expunge expletives

“There are” or “there is” is a weak way to start a sentence. “There is a telling passage toward the end of the story” lacks the focus of (and the more vivid verb in) the sentence of, “A telling passage occurs near the end of the essay.”

5. Negate nominalizations

“The report gave an analysis of the accident” uses a phrase in which a single word suffices. (This is known as a nominalization, or smothering a verb.) When you see a “(verb) a/an (noun)” construction, convert the noun into a verb and replace the phrase with it. In this case, “The report analyzed the accident” is the more concise result. As with deletion of expletives, a stronger verb is an additional benefit.

6. Delete superfluous phrases

“At the present time,” “for all intents and purposes,” and “in the event that” are a few of many meaningless phrases that clutter sentences. Trim them to tighten your writing.

7. Avoid clichés

Likewise, “face the music,” “litmus test,” “tried and true,” and other timeworn phrases add nothing to your writing but words; they’re useful only for padding a word count, but instructors and editors (and readers) will notice.

8. Eschew euphemisms

Generally, words that disguise concepts degrade language, which is all about expressing, not repressing, meaning. For example, “collateral damage,” in reference to warfare (and, by extension, to all interpersonal relationships), invites derision.

However, use of some euphemisms, such as those for human disabilities, is a well-meaning effort to preserve the dignity of the disabled, though some people argue that such cosmetic wording actually harms people by diminishing the seriousness of their condition, or that it is for the benefit not of the disabled but of people who would rather not be reminded of the disabled.

A version of this story first appeared on the blog [DailyWritingTips](#).