

Journalists' passion for eliminating wordiness probably distinguishes them from other writers more than anything else except for "giving it all away" in the first sentence of a news story.

Veteran copy editors are so adept at tightening writing that the practice becomes habit-forming, spilling into other aspects of their lives. They mumble corrections as they drive by billboards, edit menus in restaurants, fuss over redundant messages on marquees, and lecture relatives and friends for saying "fish" after "tuna" or "advance" in front of "planning."

Mass communicators understand that publication space, broadcast minutes, and consumers' time are too limited to tolerate superfluous words.

Obviously, becoming a concise writer or copy editor takes awareness and practice. Although some examples of wordiness are so apparent they can be overcome in one viewing, others are tricky, ingrained by years of unconscious use, and require conscientious effort to conquer.

In this brief chapter, we will concentrate on wordiness that should be mastered before student mass communicators apply for internships or full-time employment. Additional help is provided by more than 200 examples in Reference 4 on pages 319–324.

We'll progress from the obvious to the not-so-obvious in the following organization of categories.

## ***The Don't-Ever-Even-Think-About-Using-Again List***

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. <b>future</b> hopes/plans/dreams          | 7. <b>unpaid</b> debt      |
| 2. close <b>down/up</b>                      | 8. <b>actual/true</b> fact |
| 3. climb/rise/open <b>up</b>                 | 9. linger <b>on</b>        |
| 4. drop/descend/sit/kneel/narrow <b>down</b> | 10. free <b>of charge</b>  |
| 5. stand/divide/hurry <b>up</b>              | 11. free <b>up</b>         |
| 6. revert/refer <b>back</b>                  | 12. <b>for</b> free        |

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 13. <b>free</b> gift                       | 22. topple <b>over</b>             |
| 14. <b>advance</b> planning/notice/warning | 23. recur/repeat <b>again</b>      |
| 15. <b>previous</b> experience             | 24. cancel <b>out</b>              |
| 16. <b>past</b> history                    | 25. tuna <b>fish</b>               |
| 17. <b>current</b> trend                   | 26. plan <b>ahead</b>              |
| 18. <b>convicted</b> felon                 | 27. <b>still</b> remain            |
| 19. <b>necessary</b> requirements          | 28. anticipate <b>in advance</b>   |
| 20. over <b>with</b>                       | 29. <b>sad</b> tragedy             |
| 21. <b>new</b> innovation                  | 30. <b>*most/very/quite</b> unique |

Although this list is not exhaustive, it's a good start toward professional-quality work because the examples are so embarrassingly bad.

\*Like **perfect**, **unique** cannot be compared. Something is perfect or unique or it isn't. See page 142 for additional details and examples.

### ***The “Go-Away-and-Leave-Me-Alone” List***

Some words can do their job on their own. Don't try to help the following words by placing **together** after them.

- |                    |                     |                   |                   |                   |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. <b>assemble</b> | 6. <b>connect</b>   | 11. <b>huddle</b> | 16. <b>mesh</b>   | 21. <b>staple</b> |
| 2. <b>bind</b>     | 7. <b>cooperate</b> | 12. <b>join</b>   | 17. <b>mix</b>    | 22. <b>tangle</b> |
| 3. <b>blend</b>    | 8. <b>entwine</b>   | 13. <b>knit</b>   | 18. <b>mulch</b>  | 23. <b>tie</b>    |
| 4. <b>bond</b>     | 9. <b>fuse</b>      | 14. <b>link</b>   | 19. <b>pair</b>   | 24. <b>unite</b>  |
| 5. <b>combine</b>  | 10. <b>gather</b>   | 15. <b>merge</b>  | 20. <b>splice</b> | 25. <b>weld</b>   |

### ***The Pick-One-You-Don't-Need-Both List***

Use only one in each pair even though not all examples are mutually exclusive.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <b>any</b> and <b>all</b>              | 11. <b>16-year-old youth</b> (use 16-year-old or youth)                               |
| 2. <b>basic</b> and <b>fundamental</b>    | 12. <b>might possibly</b> (use might or possibly)                                     |
| 3. <b>each</b> and <b>every</b>           | 13. <b>10 p.m. tonight</b> (use 10 p.m. or 10 tonight)                                |
| 4. <b>full</b> and <b>complete</b>        | 14. <b>12 noon, 12 midnight</b> (use noon or midnight)                                |
| 5. <b>hope</b> and <b>trust</b>           | 15. <b>five straight wins in a row</b> (use five straight wins or five wins in a row) |
| 6. <b>hopes</b> and <b>dreams/desires</b> |   |
| 7. <b>first</b> and <b>foremost</b>       |   |
| 8. <b>if</b> and <b>when</b>              |   |
| 9. <b>true</b> and <b>accurate</b>        |   |
| 10. <b>sum total</b> (use sum or total)   |   |

### ***The So-Obvious-You-Don't-Need-It List***

Especially watch the use of **future**, **past** and **previous** because they are obvious in most contexts. Consider the following examples that lose nothing by omitting the underlined words:

1. The presidential candidates will face one another in several **future** debates.
2. After failing the first test, the student promised to study conscientiously **in the future**.
3. Johnston admitted that **in the past** he had been arrested twice.
4. **Previous** experience proves that internships often lead to full-time jobs.

### ***The You-Could-Be-Overlooking-These List***

The following are perhaps not so obvious because they are used every day not only by student journalists but also by professionals.

1. **appointed to the position of**  
(Just say the person was **appointed secretary** or **troop leader** or **city editor**.)
2. **completely** destroyed  
(**Destroyed** means completely or beyond repair. If the subject was not destroyed, use **damaged**.)
3. consensus **of opinion**  
(**Consensus** refers to solidarity of opinion.)
4. either or neither **one**  
(Once you've established the noun [candidate/officer/whatever], just say that **either** is acceptable or **neither** accepted the invitation.)
5. **end** result  
(**End** is redundant in most cases.)
6. **eyewitness**  
(You wouldn't say **ear**witness or **nose**witness for someone who hears something or smells something, would you?)
7. **final** outcome  
(**Final** is redundant in most cases.)
8. **a total of**  
(**A total of** is unnecessary. Just say 10,000 attended or \$10,000 was raised.)
9. **in order to**  
(Start with **to**. To qualify for the loan, applicants must have good credit.)
10. **funeral service**  
(A funeral is a service.)

11. in 10 **different** cities/states/countries/meetings/classes  
(The difference is obvious.)
12. **in the process of**  
(The phrase is unnecessary. Tell what's being done. The jurors are deliberating.)
13. **personal** benefits  
(All benefits are personal.)
14. **present** incumbent  
(All incumbents are present; otherwise, they would be out of the job.)
15. **successful** achievements  
(To achieve means to succeed.)
16. **temporary** reprieve  
(All reprieves are temporary.)
17. the issue **in question**  
(Tell what the issue is. The issue is college tuition.)
18. the reason is **because**  
(**Because** is not needed. The reason is a shortage of funds.)

### ***The There-Has-To-Be-a-Better-Way-of-Saying-This List***

Ready to test your skills at eliminating wordiness? What would you substitute for the following?

- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. for future reference   | 16. along the lines of        |
| 2. new innovation         | 17. as a matter of fact       |
| 3. hot water heater       | 18. at one fell swoop         |
| 4. as a general rule      | 19. at that point in time     |
| 5. aware of the fact that | 20. at the same time as       |
| 6. based on the fact that | 21. by the name of            |
| 7. came to an agreement   | 22. by the same token         |
| 8. extend an invitation   | 23. considering the fact that |
| 9. in a timely manner     | 24. due to the fact that      |
| 10. in the absence of     | 25. during the course of      |
| 11. make a decision       | 26. for the purpose of        |
| 12. held a meeting        | 27. has 15 points in the game |
| 13. with the exception of | 28. made good his/her escape  |
| 14. serious crisis        | 29. on account of             |
| 15. absolutely certain    | 30. take into consideration   |

**Answers**

**1.** for reference, **2.** innovation, **3.** water heater, **4.** generally or as a rule, **5.** knows, **6.** because, **7.** agreed, **8.** invited, **9.** promptly, **10.** without, **11.** decide, **12.** met, **13.** except, **14.** crisis, **15.** certain. **16.** like, **17.** in fact, **18.** simultaneously, **19.** then, **20.** simultaneously, **21.** named, **22.** likewise, **23.** considering, **24.** because, **25.** during, **26.** to, **27.** has 15 points, **28.** escaped, **29.** because, **30.** consider.

(You may test yourself on the material in this chapter or section by connecting with the following Web site: [www.mhhe.com/arnold5e](http://www.mhhe.com/arnold5e).)