Lesson 6: Wordiness & Flow

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Wordiness

- **If you're like me….**
  - It's always too long… abstracts, manuscripts, grant proposals, even emails (and slides!)!

- **Simply put: Wordiness is…**
  - Using too many words! ☺

- **Academic writing is replete with "fluff"**
  - e.g., "extremely significant" "due to the fact that"
  - **Why?** → Thinking it sounds "fancier," more formal, simply feels like that's how it's supposed to be / academic norms

- **BUT… it almost always adds to confusion**.
  - Harder to grasp the main point, causes the reader re-read the sentence (resulting in loss of engagement?)

- **Besides wordiness limiting readability, often, there are word limits**
  - Abstracts, manuscripts, conference submissions, grant proposals

~~Various Ways~~ Strategies ~~for Effectively Tackling the Issue of~~ to Combat Wordiness

- Focus on being <u>direct</u> / avoid unnecessary elaboration

The committee came to a consensus that the project should proceed as planned.	The committee agreed to proceed with the project.
It is essential that the proposal be considered for approval by the board.	The board must consider approving the proposal.
There are many different reasons why the project was delayed, such as unexpected budget cuts and logistical challenges.	Budget cuts and logistical challenges caused project delays.

~~Various Ways~~ Strategies ~~for Effectively Tackling the Issue of~~ to Combat Wordiness

- Avoid redundancy – remove repetitive words or phrases that don't add anything new

The new innovation will revolutionize and completely change the way we approach healthcare.	The innovation will revolutionize healthcare.

- Use active voice – more direct and concise than passive

The report was written by the manager.	The manager wrote the report.

- Avoid filler words and phrases

In order to determine the best course of action, we need to conduct a thorough analysis.	To determine the best course of action, we need to conduct a thorough analysis.

~~Various Ways~~ Strategies ~~for Effectively Tackling the Issue of~~ to Combat Wordiness

- Combine sentences

| The team conducted the experiment. The results were analyzed.	The team conducted and analyzed the experiment.

- Use lists or bullet points (sparingly, as appropriate) – field-specific

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- Always read your draft with fresh eyes and, if necessary (like when you're up against a midnight grant deadline…), have a friend review and cut for you *(they are way less attached to your words than you are ☺)*

Fillers / Fluff

| COMMON PHRASE		REPLACEMENT
Regardless of the fact that	→	although
Due to the fact that	→	because
Under the circumstances in which	→	when
Concerning the matter of	→	about / regarding
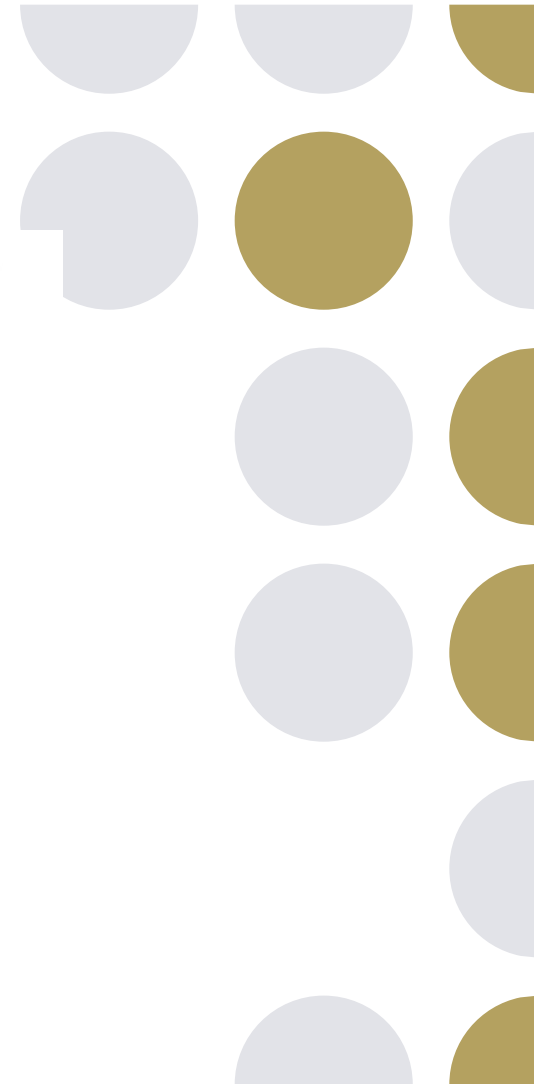
Repetitive qualifiers

While the main reason for the expedition's ~~great~~ success was careful planning, three other factors played ~~very~~ important roles: all members of the team were veteran climbers, their gear served them well, and the weather was unusually good.

Redundant Phrases
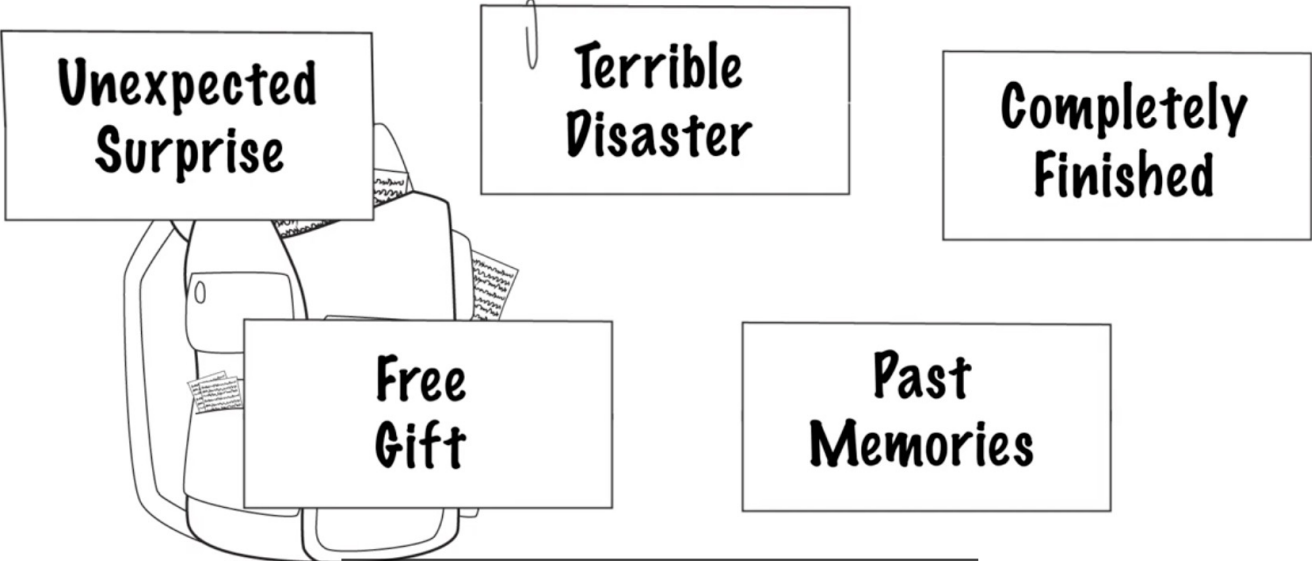
Wordiness

- **Now that we have established that wordiness is "bad"… Is it ever useful?**
  - **Perhaps.**
    - **Technical audience:** The algorithm functions through intricate recursive processes that analyze data iteratively.
    - **General audience:** The program operates by repeatedly examining and processing the data.

  - **Adding detail can clarify complex concepts or provide nuance in arguments:**
    - **Qualitative research:** Rich descriptions may be necessary to capture the intricacies of participant experiences and perspectives.

    - **Complex methodologies:** Detailed explanations are crucial to explain the method and analysis strategy, enabling researchers to replicate your experiment effectively.

Wordiness → Flow

- **Wordiness**: using more words than necessary to convey an idea
  - unnecessary repetition, verbose language, and/or convoluted sentence structures
- **Flow**: smooth and logical progression of ideas
  - From sentence to sentence **and** from paragraph to paragraph
  - If you jump around from one idea to another, you're lacking flow (more common and "easier" to do than you might think).
- Writing that "flows":
  - Easy to read smoothly from beginning to end
  - Readers don't have to stop, re-read, or work hard to find connections between ideas

Types of Flow: Global Flow

- Ideas are sequenced at the larger level: paragraphs → sections → chapters

- Common organizational patterns:
    - Chronological (e.g., a historical or a step-by-step process)
    - Grouping similar ideas (e.g., advantages / disadvantages; causes / effects)
    - Moving from large to small (e.g., national to local) or vice versa (local to national)
    - Assertion, evidence, reasoning (e.g., an argument essay)
    - Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion (e.g., experiment reports)

- No hard and fast rule. Can use different patterns or combine more than one. May be field-specific and document-specific.

If your readers can follow your organization and understand how you're connecting your ideas, they will feel as though the paper "flows."

Strategies to Improve Global Flow

COLOR CODING

- My favorite for an intro.

- Write/type out your notes on the topic at hand (make sure to indicate citations for later) - write out the notes you *might* need, don't think about the flow or excess info just yet.

- Go over the notes, and color code them.

- Helps flow and avoids a common blunder in academic writing of saying X researcher found this, Y researcher found that – *instead, focuses on connecting ideas rather than listing study findings.*
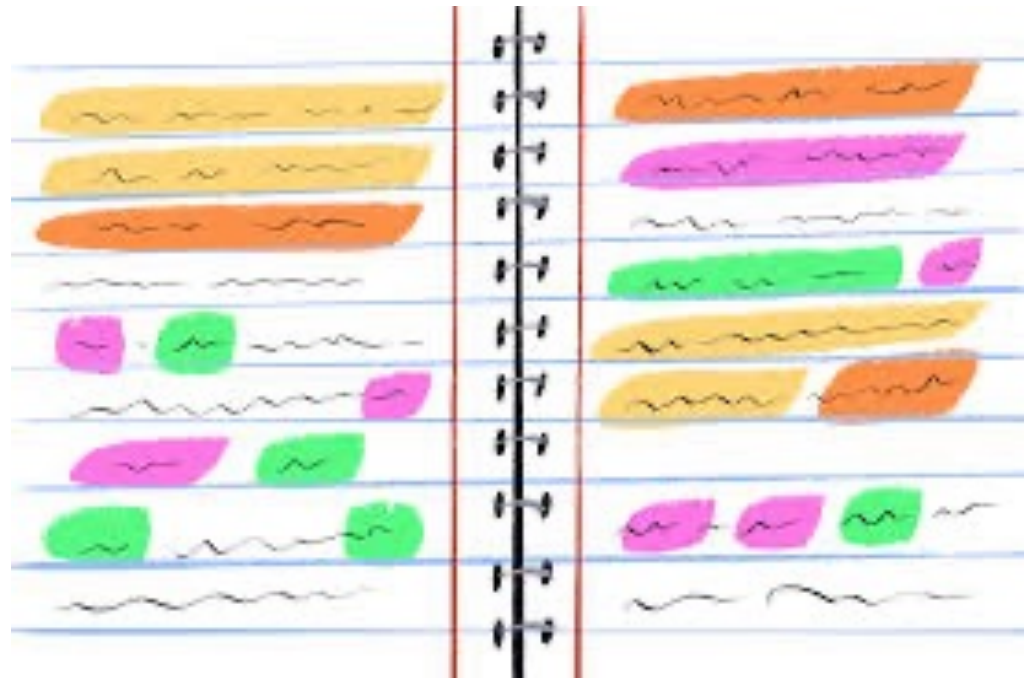
Strategies to Improve Global Flow

Reverse Outlining

Similar approach based on chunking ideas – but after the full draft is written.

Types of Flow: Local Flow

- Ideas are connected at the sentence level

- Clear connections between sentences help readers to move smoothly from one sentence to the next without stopping, doubling back, or trying to make sense of the text.

It's all about the reader.

Strategies to Improve Local Flow

- **Link Sentences Successively:** Ensure each statement smoothly connects with the preceding one to maintain coherence and logical progression *within* paragraphs.

  - *Example:* "The company implemented a new remote work policy to adapt to changing employee needs. <u>This initiative</u> aimed to improve work-life balance and boost productivity among staff members."

- **Use Connectors:** Transitional words and phrases like "presently," "meanwhile," "afterwards," "therefore," and "as a result" to indicate relationships between ideas.

  - *Example:* "The experiment yielded inconclusive results; <u>therefore</u>, further research is necessary to draw definitive conclusions."

Strategies to Improve Local Flow

- **Repeat Patterns:** Utilize repetition of structures or patterns (such as comparison, contrast, or lists) to reinforce ideas and guide the reader through complex information.
  - *Example:* "The research highlighted various advantages of AI in healthcare: improved diagnostics, enhanced patient care, and streamlined administrative processes."

- **Reiterate Key Information:** Emphasize important points by rephrasing or echoing critical details without redundancy, ensuring clarity and reinforcing the main argument.
  - *Example:* "One of the greatest disappointments of childhood is a broken promise. An adult who breaks his word never fully regains a child's trust."

Putting it All Together: Writing Sample Evaluation

1. **Read the Provided Passage:**

   Pay attention to instances of wordiness and flow.

2. **Identify Wordiness:**

   Highlight or mark areas in the passage where the language is unnecessarily verbose, redundant, or uses filler words/phrases.

3. **Evaluate Flow:**

   Note where the passage transitions smoothly between ideas and where connections between sentences and paragraphs could be improved for better coherence.

4. **Provide Feedback:**

   Using the categories of wordiness and flow discussed, provide feedback on the passage. Identify specific examples and explain why they are considered wordy or how they impact the flow of the text.

5. **Offer Suggestions for Improvement:**

   For each identified instance of wordiness or flow issue, suggest revisions or rephrasings that would enhance clarity, conciseness, and coherence. Consider using active voice, clearer transitions, and eliminating unnecessary phrases.
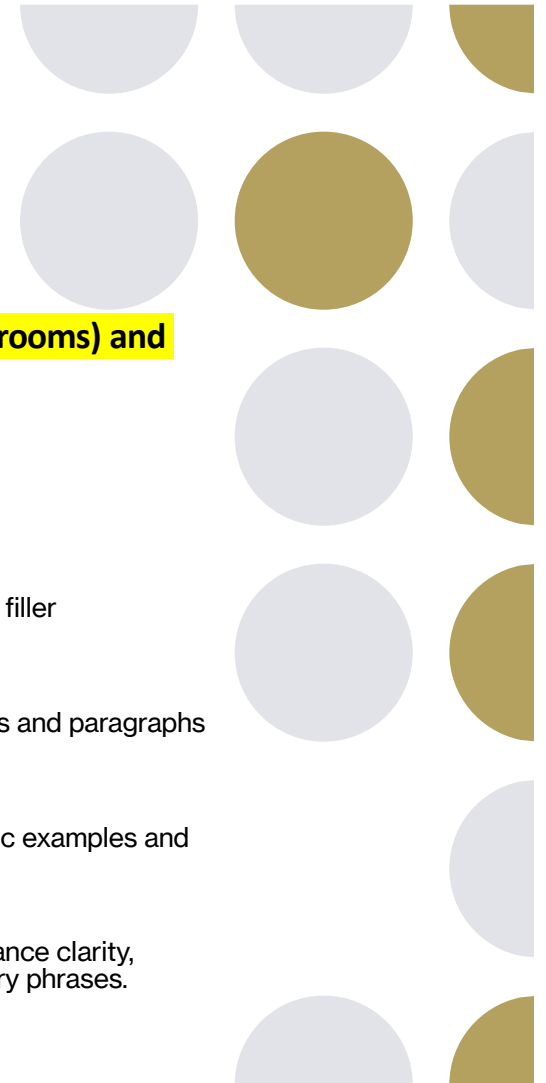
Putting it All Together: Writing Sample Evaluation

Exercise 1: Omitting unnecessary words (fillers, redundancy) – original sentence / your improved version.

Original Sentence	What is the Problem?	Revised Sentence

Exercise 2: Revising wordy sentences (larger revision than just deleting a word or two).

Original Sentence	What is the Problem?	Revised Sentence

Exercise 3: An example of a good transition (flow) (linking sentences, connectors, pattern repetition, emphasis).

Sentence(s) demonstrating good flow	What makes it good?

Exercise 4: An example of a bad transition (flow) – note what doesn't work and provide an improved version or a suggestion to improve flow

Sentence(s) demonstrating bad flow	What is the Problem?	Revised Sentence(s)