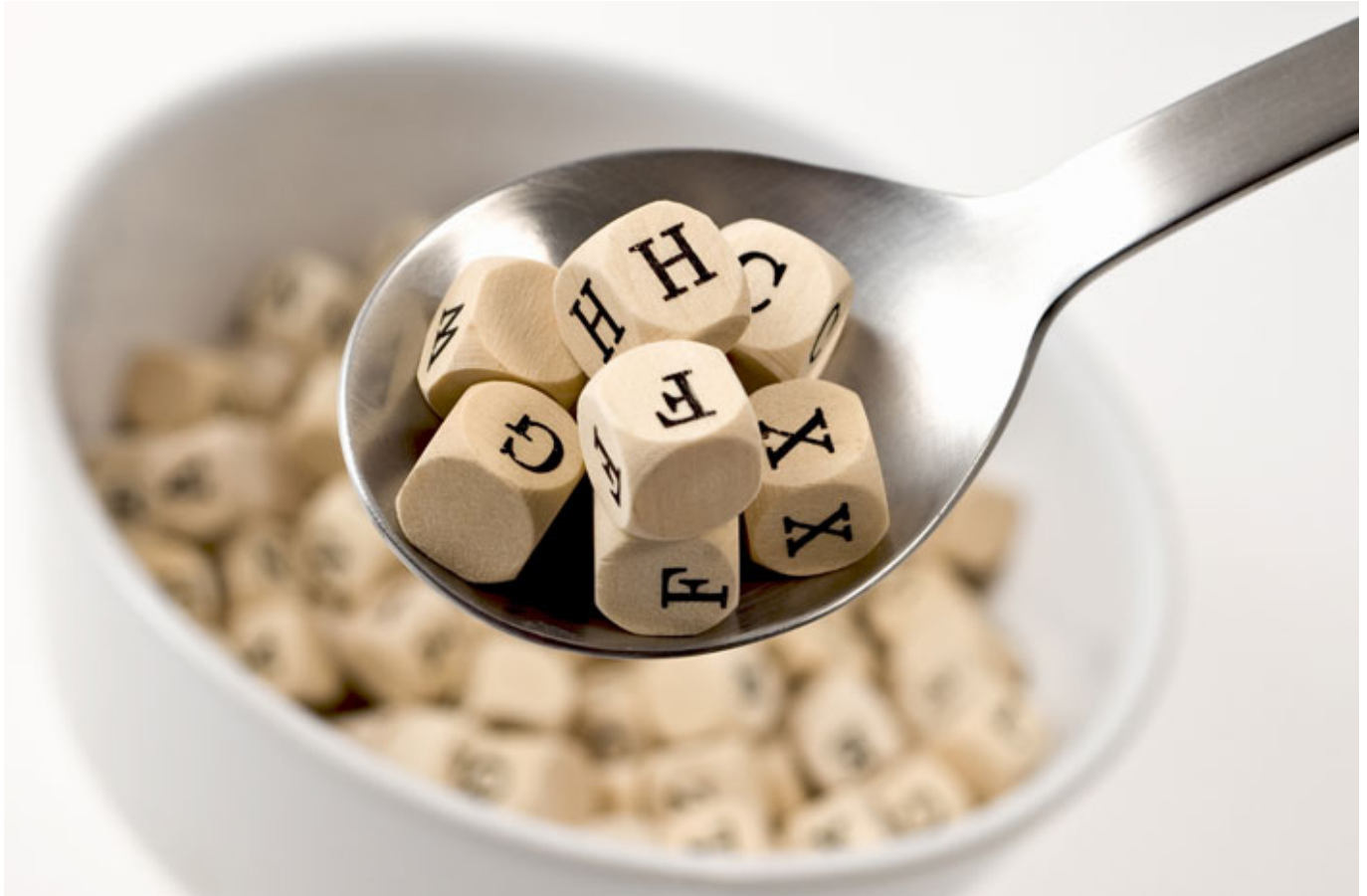


Be more concise and convincing: 7 words to drop from your writing

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Simplicity is a hallmark of good [design](#). High-converting websites prompt action in part by revealing only what users need to see. Designing with clarity is challenging; it requires careful planning and attention to every item's meaning. But the extra effort spent removing distracting elements allows visitors the freedom to fully understand a design's impact without interference.

The same is true of [writing](#). Writers may sprinkle their pieces with extra words to appear more knowledgeable or to make their argument more forceful. But wordy writing does the opposite. Too many words muddle a sentence's meaning, add confusion and make an argument less persuasive. Eliminating unnecessary words does not require you to only use short sentences or produce stories without flavor and detail. Concise writing demands you choose your words carefully and ensure that every word speaks clearly.

Concise writing is powerful.

Judges read. Judges read a lot. They do not want to slog through a brief that could have been 5 pages shorter any more than your [blog](#) readers want to sift through cumbersome posts. Increase your influence by saying what you mean — and no more. The following words and phrases should trigger your wordiness sensor. Their presence indicates your sentences could be simplified.

1. Intensifiers. Intensifiers are intended to add emphasis or weight to a statement. More often, they just sit at the beginning of a clause and take up space. “Very” is one of the most overused intensifiers. People don’t realize how frequently they write or say “very” because it is so ubiquitous. But be on the lookout.

His mother is ~~very~~ convinced that his friends are a bad influence.

Very and its cohorts — usually, really, basically and clearly, among others — are so commonly used, readers are conditioned to skim over them.

Clearly, the issue is uncontested.

These words lack precision. Your readers have different concepts of what constitutes “often” or “basic” or “very.” Give a precise time or amount if you can, and leave off the intensifier if you cannot. Remember: if you have to tell readers your argument is clear, it probably isn’t.

2. Just. “Just” degrades a statement’s tone. When “just” precedes a point or question, it can make the author seem needy.

In the sentence, *I just wondered if you could answer my question from yesterday*, introducing “just” is a subtle indication that the writer lacks the confidence to ask directly.

When “just” precedes an instruction, it can sound needlessly bossy. The phrase, *If you could just...* conjures Office Space-like [images](#) of Bill Lumbergh and TPS reports.

At its most benign, “just” just means nothing.

3. Of. “Of” typically follows one or more superfluous words. When “of” is used inappropriately, you can usually remove the whole phrase before it:

Due to ~~the nature of~~ your concerns, we will not pursue the debt any further.

Due to your concerns, we will not pursue the debt any further.

Prior to ~~the moment of~~ the discovery, the scientists doubted their hypothesis.

Prior to the discovery, the researchers doubted their hypothesis.

4. Pleonasms. “Pleonasm” comes from the Greek word “pleon,” meaning “excessive or abundant.” Pleonasm is the use of more words than needed to convey a point, specifically by using redundant phrasing. Common pleonasms include:

- advance warning
- am in the morning
- brief summary
- null and void

And the apropos:

- unnecessary redundancies

Unnecessary redundancies is borrowed from the essay, "The Affluent Rich" by Nat Boynton.

5. Wordy transitions. Transitions, like additionally, henceforth, heretofore, in order to and moreover, are popular in legal writing. A more effective way to transition from one sentence or paragraph to another is to create a logical flow by textually linking ideas. Unnecessary transition words chop up paragraphs and weaken writing by interfering with the momentum of an argument or story.

6. It, when not used as a pronoun. Some people are so attuned to the dangers of the word "it," they insist "it" can never be used to start a sentence. But the rules are not that rigid. Sometimes, starting a sentence with the pronoun "it" is the most appropriate way to maintain proper transitions in your writing. In other instances, using "it" creates a passive, wordy sentence construction:

#is important to start studying early.

We should start studying early.

#is unusual for her to be up so late.

She is up unusually late.

7. That. "That" is a tricky word. Some writers insist "that" should always be eliminated if possible. But getting rid of the word "that" can make a sentence less clear.

The partner announced the new procedures would be provided soon.

In this case, the lack of "that" makes it seem as though the partner has already announced the new procedures — until the reader reaches the end of the sentence. The sentence requires "that" in order to reduce confusion.

The partner announced that the new procedures would be provided soon.

However, "that" can be removed if it does not enhance the meaning of a sentence, often when it follows a noun:

I am curious about the idea ~~that~~ you introduced at the meeting.

Simplifying your writing by eliminating unnecessary words prevents readers from having to filter out the noise to reach your true meaning. Concise writing is more memorable and more persuasive. Practice looking for common wordiness triggers and start speaking more directly to your audience.

By [Kristen Friend](#) - Kristen is a 1999 graduate of Indiana University, with Bachelors Degrees in both journalism and religious studies. In 2003, she graduated from the International Academy of Design. She is a contributor to the Bigger Law Firm magazine, and is the Art Director for Adviatech (Custom Legal Marketing's parent company). When she isn't making law firms look their best, Kristen can be found hiking up Mt. Tamalpais or inventing gluten free baking recipes.

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