Office of Academic Writing and Publishing Support
WSC 5-Minute Mini Lesson
Topic: Economy of expression or cutting the clutter

**Purpose:** To discuss how to tighten long sentences (and paragraphs) by eliminating redundancy and wordiness.

**Redundancy**
Definition: Writers are redundant when they repeat themselves unnecessarily.

Possible reason: Writers might think they were not heard the first time; they want to be more emphatic.

Outcome: Repetitions do not add emphasis but divide the reader’s attention.

In the following examples, the italicized words are redundant and should be omitted:

- They were *both* alike.
- A *total of* 68 children participated in the activity.
- The instructions were *exactly* the same as those used in the book.
- That policy is *absolutely* essential.
- This effect has been *previously* found in other studies.
- The class was small *in size*.
- The school is *in close proximity* to the highway.
- The agreement was *completely* unanimous.
- These books are *just* exactly the same.
- I did not hear anything from him for some *period of* time.
- I will *briefly* summarize the article.


**Wordiness**
Definition: Writers are wordy when they use empty or inflated phrases. Empty phrases should be cut out; inflated phrases should be reduced to a word or two without loss of meaning.

Possible reason: Writers might think they need to embellish their writing to sound more credible or articulate.

Outcome: Empty and inflated phrases impede the ready grasp of ideas.
Examples of empty phrases:

- as a matter of fact
- at any rate
- for all intents and purposes
- in a manner of speaking
- in a very real sense
- in my (personal) opinion
- needless to say
- it goes without saying
- the point I am trying to make
- what I mean to say is that
- it seems that
- there are
- it is

(From: http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/08/19/a-manner-of-speaking-ten-usually-empty-phrases.htm)

Examples of inflated phrases and their more concise synonyms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inflated</th>
<th>Concise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Along the lines of</td>
<td>Like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At all times</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the present time</td>
<td>Now, currently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this point in time</td>
<td>Now, currently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of the fact that</td>
<td>Because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By means of</td>
<td>By</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By virtue of the fact that</td>
<td>Because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to the fact that</td>
<td>Because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the purpose of</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the reason that</td>
<td>Because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In light of the fact that</td>
<td>Because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the event that</td>
<td>If</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Exercise: Tighten the long sentences below by eliminating redundancies and/or wordiness.

1. Black slaves were thought of or stereotyped as lazy.
2. Sylvia very hurriedly scribbled her name on the back of the napkin.
3. We will file the appropriate papers in the event that we are unable to meet the deadline.
4. It is expensive to upgrade computer systems.
5. There were several students who completed the assignment.
6. The ring costs in the neighborhood of 60 dollars.
7. The colors of the reproductions were precisely exact.