

**Exercises for Legal Writers II:
Editing for Wordiness
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I. Edit Wordy Expressions.

A major problem with much writing is wordiness—using several words when one will do. A lawyer can often improve his or her writing considerably just by paring unnecessary words.

Exercise 2-1

Edit the following sentences for wordiness.

1. I am writing you in regard to your letter of March 5, 1994.
2. John is a person who succeeds at everything he does.
3. Mary left in an abrupt manner.
4. Owing to the fact that he was ill, Barry did not go to work.
5. Many people here in the city of Louisville enjoy horse racing.
6. Students use the library for research purposes.
7. She lives in the vicinity of Chicago.
8. He acted in a suspicious manner.
9. In the last few days, she recently decided to attend law school.
10. He studied abroad in France.

Answers

1. I am writing you regarding your letter of March 5, 1994.
2. John succeeds at everything he does.
3. Mary left abruptly.
4. Because he was ill, Barry did not go to work.
5. Many people in Louisville enjoy horse racing.

6. Students use the library for research.
7. She lives near Chicago.
8. He acted suspiciously.
9. In the last few days, she decided to attend law school.
10. He studied in France.

The above answers corrected two types of problems. Some answers substituted one or two words for several. Others eliminated redundant words or phrases. (Notice that the original versions of Nos. 3, 6, and 8 used an adjective and manner or purpose. Always examine phrases that contain adjectives and manner, purpose, style, or similar words for wordiness. In such instances, change the adjective to an adverb and eliminate the noun.)

The following chart lists common wordy expressions.

Wordy Expressions and Structures	Possible Substitutes
On account of	because
In view of the fact that	because
In instances in which	when
In some instances	sometimes
In spite of the fact that	although
In all likelihood	probably
As of	beginning
As yet	yet
Alongside of	alongside
In a (suspicious) manner	(suspiciously)
In a (sly) fashion	(slyly)
Of a (hostile) character	(hostile)
Is of importance	important
In a (loud) way	loudly
In many cases	often
Of a (jealous) nature	(jealously)
Due to the fact	because, since
Owing to the fact	because, since
Based on the fact that	because, since
For the reason that	because
The reason why is that	because
In favor of	for
At this point in time	now
During the time	during
Time period	time
In regard to	about, regarding
In order to	to

In terms of	avoid
Kind of	avoid
Sort of	avoid
One of the most	avoid
In relation to	about
By means of	by
In that case	then
With the exception of	except
Give an indication of	indicate
The question as to whether	whether
Have an impact upon	affect
She is a person who	she
In the vicinity of	near
In the neighborhood of	near
Pertaining to	about
Highly unlikely	unlikely
For (research) purposes	for (research)
The editing of newspapers	newspaper editing
(John), who is (Bill's son),	(John), (Bill's son),
Several of (the people)	several (people)
A number (of solutions)	numerous (solutions)
Some of the (people)	some (people)
A lot of (people)	many (people)
A large number of (students)	many (students)
A large percentage of (women)	many (women)
A variety of solutions	several (solutions)
Those kinds of	those
Large in size	large
Together with	together
Join together	join
Recur again	recur
It may be recalled that	avoid
It is clear that	avoid
It would appear that	avoid
The city of (Albany)	(Albany)
(Albany), which is in (New York)	(Albany, New York)
The level of (wages)	wages
The level of the (water)	the water level
In the area of (contracts)	(contracts)
The purpose of this paper	this paper's purpose
The concept of (property)	property
The fact is	avoid
Will in the future	will
utilize	use, employ
-wise	avoid

The above list is not exhaustive; numerous additional wordy expressions exist. A writer should closely examine his or her work and pare all wordy expressions. Of course, a writer should not change a passage's meaning for the sake of brevity.

Exercise 2-2

Edit the following sentences using the above list.

1. John is a person who likes to have fun.
2. He took an umbrella to work due to the fact that it was raining.
3. Her phone call was in regard to the Davis case.
4. A bedroom is for sleeping purposes.
5. Nancy proposed a number of solutions for Jack's roommate problem.
6. Judy lives in the city of Dayton, which is in the state of Ohio.
7. He left the party in an abrupt manner.
8. Based on the fact that he hates pasta, Larry didn't join us for dinner.
9. He lives in the neighborhood of the law school.
10. Owing to the fact that several of the students failed the property test, Professor James gave a test for makeup purposes.
11. The level of the water in the river is at flood stage.
12. The principal canceled school on account of snow.
13. A large percentage of women support the law.
14. In view of the fact that he had been drafted, Martin wrote a will.
15. The bad economy has had an impact on home sales.
16. The school will in the future add a program in health law.
17. Those kinds of teenagers frequently smoke pot.
18. All my friends came to my party with the exception of Peggy.
19. The level of wages remained steady last year.

20. Our lawyers suggested a variety of solutions.

Answers

1. John likes to have fun.
2. He took an umbrella to work because it was raining.
3. Her phone call was about the Davis case.
4. A bedroom is for sleeping.
5. Nancy proposed several solutions for Jack's roommate problem.
6. Judy lives in Dayton, Ohio.
7. He left the party abruptly.
8. Because he hates pasta, John didn't join us for dinner.
9. He lives near the law school.
10. Because several students failed the property test, Professor James gave a makeup test.
11. The river is at flood stage.
12. The principal canceled school because of snow.
13. Many women support the law.
14. Because he had been drafted, Martin wrote a will.
15. The bad economy has affected home sales.
16. The school will add a program in health law.
17. Those teenagers frequently smoke pot.
18. All my friends came to the party except Peggy.
19. Wages remained steady last year.
20. Our lawyers suggested several solutions.

II. Eliminate Unnecessary Repetitions.

Wordiness also occurs because of unnecessary repetitions. Consider the following sentence: He left suddenly in an abrupt manner. A writer should eliminate either suddenly or in an abrupt manner because they say the same thing. He left abruptly, or he left suddenly.

Exercise 2-3

Eliminate the unnecessary repetitions in the following sentences.

1. The weather here in Louisville is beautiful.
2. Each and every person should attend his lectures.
3. Her painting was beautiful in appearance.
4. His presentation was equally as good as John's.
5. She is shorter in height than her sister.
6. The car was blue in color.
7. I personally have never been to Europe.
8. The weather will probably continue to remain cold.
9. The professor allowed him to retake the test again.
10. The spacecraft was oval in shape.

Answers

1. The weather in Louisville is beautiful.
2. Every person should attend his lectures.
3. Her painting was beautiful.
4. His presentation was as good as John's.
5. She is shorter than her sister.
6. The car was blue.
7. I have never been to Europe.
8. The weather will probably remain cold.

9. The professor allowed him to retake the test.

10. The spacecraft was oval.

Another source of wordiness is unnecessary repetition of a word or phrase in a sentence.

Examples.

The drive will take two days or three days.

The drive will take two or three days.

The attack will come by land, by sea, or by air.

The attack will come by land, sea, or air.

Exercise 2-4

Eliminate the unnecessary words or phrases in the following sentences.

1. Mark likes eighteenth-century music and nineteenth-century music.

2. Susan's hair was black; Mary's hair was blonde.

3. You will succeed by working hard, by living frugally, and by caring about others.

4. John likes his classes during third period and fifth period.

5. Kevin liked Anne because she was smart, because she was kind, and because she was polite.

6. Jim had five dollars, Jack had four dollars, and Jill had six dollars.

7. Sally had a yellow sports car, and Joe had a red sports car.

8. You cannot go to the party until you do your homework and until you clean up your room.

9. The class accepts children who are five-years old, six-years old, or seven-years old.

10. A student can complete the degree in three years, in four years, or in five years.

Answers

1. Mark likes eighteen- and nineteenth-century music.

2. Susan's hair was black; Mary's, blonde.

3. You will succeed by working hard, living frugally, and caring about others.

4. John likes his third and fifth period classes.

5. Kevin liked Anne because she was smart, kind, and polite.
6. Jim had five dollars, Jack four, and Mary six.
7. Sally had a yellow sports car, and Joe had a red one.
8. You cannot go to the party until you do your homework and clean up your room.
9. The class accepts children who are five-, six-, or seven-years old. (or The class accepts five-, six-, or seven year old children).
10. The student can complete the degree in three, four, or five years.

III. Eliminate "There" or "It" Constructions.

Constructions using there or it may produce wordiness. “There are many people who like classical music.” “Many people” is the subject of this sentence; “there are” is unnecessary. One can rewrite this sentence as follows: “Many people like classical music.”

“It is apparent to everyone that Mary committed the crime.” The phrase beginning “it is” is unnecessary. The sentence means the same thing if “it is” is deleted: “Mary committed the crime.”

Not all phrases that begin with there or it are unnecessary. There is proper when it is the subject of the sentence. Likewise, it is proper when it depicts something definite.

Examples.

There are five reasons to take evidence.
Grapefruit is very healthy. It contains vitamin C.

Exercise 2-5

Eliminate wordy there or it clauses from the following sentences.

1. It is obvious that John will win the competition.
2. There are many ways to train a dog.
3. There are six subjects the professor might test us on.
4. There are five students nominated for the scholarship.
5. It is probable that it will snow tonight.
6. It is cold in this room.

7. There are at least five women who can win the competition.
8. John told me it is a good book.
9. It is probable that the Giants will win the Super Bowl.
10. There are too many people packed into the concert hall.

Answers

1. John will obviously win the competition.
2. Correct; there is the subject.
3. The professor might test us on six subjects.
4. Five students are nominated for the scholarship.
5. It will probably snow tonight.
6. This room is cold.
7. At least five women can win the competition.
8. Correct; it stands for a particular book.
9. The Giants will probably win the Super Bowl.
10. Too many people are packed into the concert hall.

IV. Eliminate Long Descriptive Phrases.

Another source of wordiness is long descriptive phrases. One can often rewrite long descriptive phrases in one or two words.

Examples.

She is a student who works hard.

She is a hard-working student.

He was depressed by the weather, which was dark and dreary.

He was depressed by the dark and dreary weather. or

He was depressed by the dark, dreary weather.

One can also shorten descriptive phrases by eliminating repetitions.

Example.

Your paper should be five pages or six pages.
Your paper should be five or six pages.

Exercise 2-6

Rewrite the wordy descriptions in the following sentences.

1. People who are uninformed tend to vote for candidates who are well-known.
2. Joan won the competition with a performance that was brilliant.
3. He wore a coat of many colors.
4. She wore a shirt that was colorful.
5. The director is planning a movie that will last two hours or three hours.
6. He saved money for graduate school by only buying books that were used.
7. Frank liked the song that was soft and beautiful.
8. Carrie had two children who were polite and well-behaved.
9. I am looking for a job that will satisfy me more.
10. With a look that told of her deep sadness, Debbie turned and walked away.
11. The problems of teenagers are often overwhelming.
12. The teacher liked his paper on French music.
13. The teacher liked the paper of John.
14. The car that Leslie owns is red.
15. The house that belongs to John is for sale.

Answers

1. Uninformed people tend to vote for well-known candidates.
2. Joan won the competition with a brilliant performance.
3. He wore a many-colored coat.

4. She wore a colorful dress.
5. The director is planning a two or three hour movie.
6. He saved money for graduate school by buying used books.
7. Frank liked the soft, beautiful song.
8. Carrie had two polite, well-behaved children.
9. I am looking for a more satisfying job.
10. With a deeply-sad look, Debbie turned and walked away.
11. Teenager's problems are often overwhelming.
12. Correct.
13. The teacher liked John's paper.
14. Leslie's car is red.
15. John's house is for sale.

One might prefer the original version of sentence ten. As has been stated above, the shorter version is not always the preferable one, but it usually is.

V. Eliminate Wordy Negative Expressions.

Another way to pare wordiness, as well as make your writing sound more direct, is to express the negative in a positive form. Similarly, a writer should try to avoid statements that use not.

Examples.

Max is not trustworthy.

Max is untrustworthy.

She could not remember his name.

She forgot his name.

That argument is not important.

That argument is trifling (or unimportant).

Exercise 2-7

Edit the following sentences to eliminate wordy negative expressions.

1. Marge is not going to the prom.

2. The child doesn't like carrots.
3. Jane was not encouraged by her grade in French.
4. The teacher doesn't trust Bob's honesty.
5. Her coat wasn't very big.
6. The child was not afraid of the bully.
7. Susan was not intimidated by the step slope.
8. The accident occurred because Laura did not pay attention to her parent's rules.
9. The change in the law is not major.
10. The professor does not frequently give Fs.

Answers

1. Marge is skipping the prom.
2. The child dislikes carrots.
3. Jane was discouraged by her grade in French.
4. The teacher distrusts Bob.
5. Her coat was small.
6. The child was unafraid of the bully.
7. Susan was unintimidated by the step slope.
8. The accident occurred because Laura ignored her parent's rules.
9. The change in the law is minor.
10. The professor gives Fs infrequently.

VI. Shorten Introductory Phrases.

One can often shorten introductory phrases by replacing a noun and a verb with the "ing" form of the verb.

Example.

After she ate dinner, Marcia went to bed.

After eating dinner, Marcia went to bed.

The first version is not incorrect; a writer can use both constructions for variety.

Exercise 2-8

Change the nouns and verbs in the introductory clauses to the "ing" form of the verbs.

1. While he was on vacation, Doug visited his sister in Denver.
2. After she waited for three years, Sarah applied to law school.
3. Before you brush your teeth, you should gargle with a mouth wash.
4. When you cook Chinese food, you should chop the vegetables finely.
5. When you look at the sky, you should be careful not to stare directly at the sun.

Answers

1. While vacationing, Doug visited his sister.
2. After waiting three years, Sarah applied to law school.
3. Before brushing, you should gargle with a mouth wash.
4. When cooking chinese food, you should chop the vegetables finely.
5. When looking at the sky, you should be careful not to stare directly at the sun.

When making the above changes, you should be careful not to create a dangling participle--a phrase that attaches to the wrong subject.

VII. Additional Exercises.

Exercise 2-9

Eliminate the wordiness in the following sentences using the techniques contained in this chapter.

1. Each and every person should work for charities for free.
2. Owing to the fact that weather here in the city of Daytona usually is warm in the winter, it is probable that heating costs will be low.
3. There are several factors to be considered, such as the time of year, the weather, etc.

4. It is obvious that one must study a number of hours per day to succeed in law school.
5. There are at least five people who can do the job as well as Bob can do the job.
6. He stared at Bob's hair, which is red in color.
7. The teacher talked to John's parents in regard to a number of problems he was having with his school work.
8. Mary wanted to attend Columbia University, which is in the city of New York, owing to the fact that it is highly regarded reputationwise.
9. Kate is a person who will be a good social worker based on the fact that she cares about people.
10. It is obvious that the economy will not improve until the time that consumers begin to spend more money or until the time that Congress reduces taxes.
11. He liked the stories of John Cheever.
12. Becky married Sam because he is kind and because he is handsome.
13. The plays are in two acts or in three acts.
14. Owing to the fact that it was snowing and owing to the fact that it was cold, Bob wore his heavy coat, and Bob wore his earmuffs.
15. John walked down the road in a slow manner, due to the fact that he had hurt his foot in an accident that was nobody's fault.
16. She is a player who can have an impact on the team's rebounding.
17. In spite of the fact he was tired, Larry went to the party.
18. The review was pertaining to the book of Mary Davis.
19. Jack is a person who likes clothes that are blue in color.
20. Each and every guest will receive a prize.

Answers

1. Every one should work for charities.
2. Because the weather in Daytona is usually warm in the winter, heating costs will probably be low.
3. We must consider several factors, such as the time of the year and the weather.

4. One must study several hours per day to succeed in law school.
5. At least five people can do the job as well as Bob can.
6. He stared at Bob's red hair.
7. The teacher talked to John's parents about problems he was having with his school work.
8. Mary wanted to attend Columbia University in New York City because it is highly regarded.
9. Kate will be a good social worker because she cares about people.
10. The economy will not improve until consumers begin to spend more money or Congress reduces taxes.
11. He liked John Cheever's stories.
12. Becky married John because he is kind and handsome.
13. The plays are in two or three acts.
14. Because it was snowing and cold, Bob wore his heavy coat and earmuffs.
15. John walked down the road slowly because he had accidentally hurt his foot.
16. She can help the team's rebounding.
17. Although he was tired, Larry went to the party.
18. The review was about Mary Davis's book.
19. Jack likes blue clothes.
20. Each guest will receive a prize.

Exercise 2-10

Look for wordiness in a paper you have recently written.

Exercise 2-11

Edit the following paragraph.

It is obvious that the defendant is guilty of the crime of murder he is accused of. First, a number of witnesses saw him run from the scene of the crime in a quick manner. Second, his

fingerprints were found on the gun that was used for the murder by the police. Third, tests showed that he had recently fired a gun within the last six hours. Finally, he could not produce an alibi that showed he was elsewhere at the time the murder was committed. Based on these facts, the defendant should receive a conviction from the jury.

Answer

The defendant is obviously guilty of murder. First, several witnesses saw him run from the crime scene. Second, the police found his prints on the murder weapon. Third, tests showed that he had fired a gun within the last six hours. Finally, he could not produce an alibi. Accordingly, the jury should convict the defendant.

Conclusion

The chapter has shown how to improve your writing by recognizing and correcting mechanical problems in your drafts. The key to fixing these problems is awareness; once you are aware that your writing contains too much wordiness, the problem is easy to correct. The best way to recognize these problems is to read your drafts out loud. While each unnecessary word may seem minor, if you can correct all the minor problems in your papers, your writing will markedly improve.