

Concise writing

It is important in academic writing to make your point in as few words as possible. Writing concisely shows you understand the concepts and are not using unnecessary words to ‘pad out’ your assignments. Lecturers often impose word limits for this reason.

Techniques for writing concisely

Make your point straight away:

“This demonstrates that ...”

“... relates to ...”

“Secondly, ...”

“Finally, ...”

‘Stack’ your adjectives and eliminate unnecessary words:

“The group of science students sat their exams” vs “The science students sat their exams.”

“Smith (2006) also believed this to be true, but took into consideration the fact that some managers preferred to have long meetings that took all day” vs “Smith (2006) agreed, but acknowledged that some managers preferred to have longer, all-day meetings.”

Avoid qualifying words that mean the same thing:

Unconcise	More concise (usually)
past records	records
separate out	separate
looking back in retrospect	in retrospect

Omit unnecessary words:

Unconcise	More concise (usually)
lowering the rope down	lowering the rope
fewer in number	fewer

due to the fact that	because
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Avoid saying the same thing twice:

Unconcise	More concise (usually)
The farmer sheared the sheep and removed all their wool.	The farmer sheared the sheep.

Be wary of clumsy sentences where extra words have been added that detract from the point being made:

“There are several of the soldiers, each with their guns and ammunition, who gathered at the gates of the camp before dawn” vs “Several of the soldiers, each with their own guns and ammunition, gathered at the camp gates before dawn.”

Examples of writing concisely

Unconcise	More concise (usually)
accounted for by the fact that	because
are of the same opinion	agree
as already stated	[omit]
as can be seen from Figure 1, XYZ reduces twitching.	XYZ reduces twitching (Fig.1)

Checklist- check that you are not:

- Telling the reader the ‘life story’ (giving unnecessary detail) of your assignment
 - For example: “I thought it would be a good idea to...”
- Giving the life story of the theory you are using
 - For example: “After a lot of study, the Ministry came up with....”
- Apologising or making excuses
 - For example: “...but there is not enough space to list them all.”
- Giving a shopping list of every item in a theory (when not all are relevant to your issue)
 - For example: “...which are people, health, knowledge and skills.”
- Repeating words or phrases in the same sentence or paragraph
 - For example: “The concept of learning involves learning...”
- Including vague comments or evaluations, or comments unsupported by fact
 - For example: “It is a well-known fact that...”

Checklist- check that you are:

- Including in-text references
 - For example: “...a relative recent practice (Cotteral & Mulligan, 2007).”
- Including short, insightful summaries of approaches and theories

- For example: “This model is based on a broad and holistic view of social well-being.”

Academic writing and study skills support

1. Academic Q+A

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

2. Consultations

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment’s structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

4. Pre-reading Service

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students s an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment’s structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

5. Workshops

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).