

FAT-FREE WRITING OR HOW TO ELIMINATE WORDINESS IN 10 EASY STEPS

Presented by Annie Oortman and Darlene Buchholz

~~How to say the most in the least amount of time.~~

Why is this important?

- An author frugal with words not only writes a more readable manuscript, but increases the chances it is accepted. Editors are short on time, so why not make reading your prose easier and faster?
- A good writer tries to be invisible. Good prose is writing that seems not written at all. Like a window, you see through the words to grasp the meaning. The reader is unaware of the language.
- The less you write, the more readers read.

Fat: For all intents and purposes, the reason Roland arrived too late to save his first wife's life was due to the fact that he stopped at a very seedy bar outside of town that served liquid courage.

Fat-Free: Roland arrived too late to save his first wife because he stopped at a bar for liquid courage.

Ten Easy Steps to Fat-Free Writing

1. Write. Worry about wordiness later.
2. Mark sections of your writing where you struggled.
3. Take a breather before you begin cutting fat.
4. Learn what wordiness patterns are typical of your writing.
5. Print a hard copy of your manuscript. Change typeface, size or color.
6. Read your prose aloud. Read s-l-o-w-l-y.
7. Mark up your printout. Fix wordiness issues later.
8. Avoid grammar checkers and editing software.
9. Repeat Steps 2 through 9.
10. Get another opinion.

- **Eliminate redundancy.**

Fat: Zarek tried not to anticipate in advance events that would completely change his view of Astrid's past history.

Fat-Free: Zarek tried not to anticipate events that would change his view of Astrid's history.

Fat: Tony began to behave strangely and in odd ways following his tryst with Celeste.

Fat-Free: Tony began to behave strangely following his tryst with Celeste.

- **Delete intensifiers that don't intensify.**

Fat: Basically, Max never lets his emotions get in the way of his very difficult job.

Fat-Free: Max never lets emotions get in the way of his difficult job.

Fat: For all intents and purposes, Brianna really believed she'd outrun the man that promised to kill her... her husband.

Fat-Free: Brianna believed she'd outrun the man that promised to kill her... her husband.

- **Refrain from important sounding phrases that add nothing to a sentence.**

Fat: At this point in time, this policy has a tendency to isolate some communities.

Fat-Free: This policy tends to isolate communities.

Fat: Legislators need to be more careful of the type of policy they propose.

Fat-Free: Legislators need to be more careful of the policy they propose.

- **Avoid starting sentences with expletives.**

Fat: It was Lucian's last statement that finally persuaded Grace to leave.

Fat-Free: Lucian's last statement finally persuaded Grace to leave.

Fat: There was a long line of condos Lisa passed before she reached Tony's.

Fat-Free: Lisa passed a long line of condos before reaching Tony's.

- **Rewrite passive voice into active voice (when possible).**

Fat: The tablecloths were discarded after the party by Caroline.

Fat-Free: After the party, Caroline discarded the tablecloths.

Fat: Jamie was wanted by every woman in the bar.

Fat-Free: Every woman in the bar wanted Jamie.

- **Reduce clauses to phrases; reduce phrases to single words.**

Fat: The real test lies in the degree to which Janine's seduction affected Luc.

Fat-Free: The real test is how much Janine's seduction affected Luc.

Fat: Despite the fact that Prescott was a notorious rogue, Edwina couldn't stop loving him.

Fat-Free: Although Prescott was a notorious rogue, Edwina couldn't stop loving him.

- **Remove adjective clauses (when possible).**

Fat: The horse farm that was on the other side of Tennessee asked Nora to work with a new jockey who was hired away from Dreamcatcher Ranch.

Fat-Free: The horse farm on the other side of Tennessee asked Nora to work with a new jockey from Dreamcatcher Ranch.

Fat: Christopher was determined to ask the American who was on board to marry him.

Fat-Free: Christopher was determined to ask the American on board to marry him.

- **Rewrite prepositional phrases into one-word modifiers (when possible).**

Fat: The owner of the race team refused to hire Adam as crew chef.

Fat-Free: The race team owner refused to hire Adam as crew chef.

Fat: The department of nursing refused to accept Jasmine's application.

Fat-Free: The nursing department refused to accept Jasmine's application.

- **Weed out extraneous words or phrases.**

Fat: Beau came to the realization that he needed a plan to force Celeste into marrying him.

Fat-Free: Beau realized he needed a plan to force Celeste into marrying him.

Fat: Janine made a search of the bedroom before Luc returned.

Fat-Free: Janine searched the bedroom before Luc returned.

- **Delete meaningless adverbs.**

Fat: Grace convincingly explained her problem regarding the will.

Fat-Free: Grace explained her problem regarding the will

Fat: Arik considered marriage a major commitment.

Fat-Free: Arik considered marriage a commitment.

- **Weed out extraneous words or phrases.**

Fat: Beau came to the realization that he needed a plan to force Celeste into marrying him.

Fat-Free: Beau realized he needed a plan to force Celeste into marrying him.

Fat: Janine made a search of the bedroom before Luc returned.

Fat-Free: Janine searched the bedroom before Luc returned.

- **Eliminate clichés and euphemisms.**

Fat: Kerrigan took a long, hard look at his situation.

Fat-Free: Kerrigan scrutinized his situation.

Fat: Pamela's clothes had seen better days.

Fat-Free: Pamela's clothes were shabby.

- **Remove forms of "to be" whenever possible.**

Fat: Jake was considered to be the greatest swordsman in the highlands.

Fat-Free: Jake was considered the greatest swordsman in the highlands.

Fat: Most of Robin's family found her fiancé to be distant and aloof.

Fat-Free: Most of Robin's family found her fiancé distant and aloof.

- **Avoid saying the same thing twice.**

Fat: Sin circled around the dying Scot in spite of the fact Dermot asked him to leave.

Fat-Free: Sin circled the dying Scot although Dermot asked him to leave.

Fat: Janine made a search of the bedroom before Luc returned at 3 am in the morning.

Fat-Free: Janine searched the bedroom before Luc returned at 3 am.

<u>Wordy Phrases</u>	<u>Redundant Phrases</u>
all of (the); all of (us)... all (the); (we) all	absolutely essential... essential
almost all... most	actual experience... experience
a lot of... many, much	advance planning, advance warning... planning, warning
as long as... if, since	and also... either <i>and</i> or <i>also</i> (not both)
as of now... about	ask the question... ask
assuming that... if	basic fundamental... basic, fundamental
at the time (that)... when	clearly evident... evident, obvious
come to an end... close, end, finish, halt, stop	close proximity... proximity
conduct an investigation... investigate, explore, examine	(blue, green, red...) in color... blue, green, red...
despite the fact that... although, even though, despite	completely opposite... opposite
due to the fact that... because, since, for, as	continue on... continue
except when... unless	current status... status
give rise to... cause, lead to, result in	doctorate degree... doctorate
has no... lacks	each and every... <i>each</i> or <i>every</i> (not both)
in addition... also, and, as well, further, then, too	end product, end result... product, result
in an effort to... to	first and foremost... first
in order to... to, for	future plans... plans
in the past (days, months, weeks, years)... before, earlier	if and when... either <i>if</i> or <i>when</i>
in place of... for	join together... join
in spite of... after all, despite, even with, although	month of january, month of may... january, may
in the (very) near future... soon, before long, in a week, next month, shortly, this year, tomorrow	more and more... often
is able to... can	none at all... none
not many... few	over and over... again, repeatedly
not possible... impossible	past history... history
not the same... different	previous experience... experience
one of the... a, an, one	period of time... either <i>period</i> or <i>time</i>
present time... present, now	personal opinion... opinion
some of the... some	personally responsible... responsible
spell out... explain, specify, describe, detail	point in time... now, today
take action... act	revert back... revert
to a certain degree... in part, less so, partially, some	same identical... same
use up... use	small in size... small
with regard to... about, regarding	time period... time, period
	usual habit... habit

<u>Trite, Overused & Plain Old Tired Expressions to Stop Using</u>		
all things considered	fall on deaf ears	never a dull moment
arm and a leg	few and far between	no love lost
as a matter of fact	flat as a pancake	one in a million
at the present time	for all intents and purposes	open-and-shut-case
at loose ends	for the most part	pain in the butt
bat out of hell	for the purpose of	rat race
behind the eight ball	face the music	ripe old age
bitter end	give a damn	sad but true
bitter disappointment	has a tendency to	safe than sorry
black as pitch	hidden agenda	sands of time
born and raised	hook, line, and sinker	sick as a dog
by and large	hour of need	sigh of relief
case of mistaken identity	in a manner of speaking	small world
caught red-handed	in a very real sense	sneaking suspicion
checkered career	in my opinion	spitting image
countless hours	intents and purposes	the final analysis
crack of dawn	in the case of	this day and age
creature comfort	in the final analysis	this point in time
crushing blow	in the nick of time	tired but happy
curry favor	in the process of	trial and error
cut and dried	it seems that	tried and true
death's doorstep	leaps and bounds	true blue
dim view	lock, stock, and barrel	type of
due to the fact that	loved and lost	whirlwind tour
enough already	male chauvinist	white as a sheet
everyday life	meaningful relationship	with good intentions
evil twin	moment's respite	worst nightmare
face the music	moving experience	young and foolish

For more info...

The Dictionary of Concise Writing, Robert Hartwell Fiske.

The Dimwit's Dictionary, Robert Hartwell Fiske.

265 Troubleshooting Strategies for Writing Nonfiction, Barbara Fine Clouse.

Online Writing Lab, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Literacy Education Online, <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/>

Garbl's Writing Center, www.garbl.com