

Concision and Clarity: Decreasing Word Count, Increasing Readability, and Proving Your Value

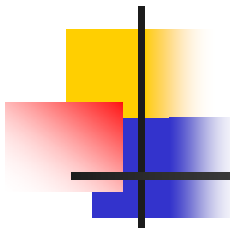
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Cicero: Regard the weight of words rather than their number.



How word reduction benefits companies, writers, and readers

- Decreases cost—Of creation, publication, maintenance, and translation
- Increases readability—Presents content as clearly and concisely as possible
- Increases usability—Presents the text that the user needs in the context in which he needs it
- Supports reusability and single sourcing



Why editors are the perfect word reducers

- Editors are language masters; they apply understanding and knowledge (not just rules and styles).
- Editors are adept at evaluating content from the user's viewpoint.
- Editors are adept at adjusting text to the purpose, the form, and the audience.
- Editors are manic about consistency and clarity.



How word reduction proves your value

Word reduction produces results that are obvious and readily quantifiable.

Example of typical document, typical degree of reduction:

- Pre-reduction—24,000 words, 100 pages
- Post-reduction—16,800 words, 70 pages
- Reduction—7200 words, 30 pages (30%)
- Savings in translation cost of one language: \$2,880



Why the value-added figure continues to increase

- Publication costs down
- Maintenance and update efforts down
- Memory required for storage down
- Translation costs down (As the number of languages increases, the savings increase.)
- Benefits of single sourcing and modular writing up (Each time a word-reduced chunk is used, savings increase.)



How we word reduce

- Delete worthless words
- Eliminate wordy wording
- Streamline and focus lists, tables, procedures, and headings
- Rephrase sentences and restructure paragraphs
- Delete useless (superfluous, repetitive, redundant, or irrelevant) content



Examples of worthless words

- Add values **together**.
 - To create a **new** report,
 - Edit an **existing** report.
 - Click **either** Yes or No.
 - To start up the server,
 - Enter a specific name.
 - If names match exactly
 - If the reports are **already** named,
 - A combination of different formats
- Add values.
 - To create a report,
 - Edit a report.
 - Click Yes or No.
 - To start the server,
 - Enter a name.
 - If names match,
 - If the reports are named,
 - A combination of formats



Examples of wordy wording

- Select **a single** color.
 - **In order to** link pages,
 - You **need to** format
 - They are displayed **at one time**.
 - A **number of** formats
 - After you **have** finished,
 - If **there is** a file type that your browser cannot open,
- Select one color.
 - To link pages,
 - You must format
 - They are displayed simultaneously.
 - Numerous formats
 - After you finish,
 - If your browser cannot open all file types,



Guidelines for lists and tables

- Do not use both table captions and text references (such as “The following table identifies”).
- When possible, relate table information so closely to the preceding text that text references and table captions are unnecessary.
- When possible, relate list items so closely to the text that precedes them that list introductions are unnecessary.
- For list introductions and table captions, prefer phrases.
- For list and cell items, prefer phrases and do not include tangential information.
- Place information that applies to all items of a list or table in the list introduction or the header row.
- Make list introductions, table captions, and header row labels as specific as possible.



Example of table-introduction repetition

You can use the Microsoft Word toolbar to perform various tasks. Each menu item provides a list of commands.

The following table lists the menu items that are located on the Microsoft toolbar and their commands.

Table 3: Microsoft Menu Items and Their Commands



Example of table-introduction reduction

You can use the Microsoft Word toolbar to perform various tasks. Each menu item provides a list of commands.

Menu Item	Commands
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Example of a wordy list

The Microsoft Word toolbar provides access to the following menus:

- File menu—From the File menu, you can select New, Open, Close,
- Edit menu—From the Edit menu, you can select Edit, Paste,
- View menu—From the View menu, you can select



Example of a reduced list

The Microsoft Word toolbar provides access to various menus and commands:

- File—New, Open, Close, ...
- Edit—Edit, Paste, ...
- View—Normal, Web Layout, Print Layout, ...



Guidelines for procedures

- Focus on the purpose of the procedure.
- Don't present conceptual information.
- Don't include steps that negate the purpose of the procedure.
- Don't include information that the context makes obvious.



Example of a wordy procedure

To cut and paste a paragraph:

1. In Microsoft Word, open the document that contains the paragraph that you want to cut and paste.
You can open your document in any word-processing program. Word processing programs are sold by a number of companies.
2. Select the paragraph that you want to cut and paste.
3. On the toolbar menu, select Edit.
4. From the Edit drop-down menu, select Cut.
5. If you don't want to cut the paragraph that you selected, from the Edit drop-down menu, select Undo Cut.
6. In Microsoft Word, open the document into which you want to paste the paragraph that you selected in step 2.
7. And so on



Example of a reduced procedure

To cut and paste a paragraph:

1. Open the document that contains the paragraph that you want to cut and paste.
2. Select the paragraph.
3. Select Edit > Cut.
4. If you selected the wrong paragraph, select Edit > Undo Cut, and repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Open the document into which you want to paste the paragraph.
6. And so on



Strategies for sentences and paragraphs

- Use plural nouns.
- Convert phrases to words and clauses to phrases.
- Sequence adjectives.
- Create compound elements (verbs, subjects, and complements).
- Create modifying phrases and clauses.
- Use punctuation (em dashes, parentheses, and commas).



Examples of sentence and paragraph strategies

- When a worksheet is calculated
 - The title of the chart
 - After you select a color, you
 - You must decide whether borders need to be applied.
 - A workbook that contains numerous worksheets may become cumbersome. Consider splitting a workbook that contains numerous worksheets into one or more workbooks.
 - Before you save a report, you must specify a report name. The name must contain between 5 and 9 characters. The characters must be alphanumeric.
- When worksheets are calculated
 - The chart title
 - After selecting a color, you
 - You must decide whether to apply borders.
 - Because a workbook that contains numerous worksheets may become cumbersome, consider creating multiple workbooks.
 - Before saving a report, specify a report name (5 to 9 alphanumeric characters).



Question that identifies useless content

Does the reader need this information here?

Yes, retain it.

No, delete it.



Example of useless (not needed here) content

Calculation

To calculate numeric entries, you

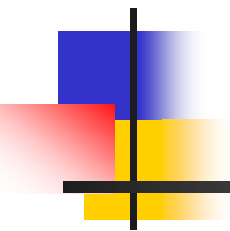
Because date-format entries are treated as text, not as numbers, you cannot calculate them. To apply a date format to a cell, you use the Format Cells dialog box, which you access from the Format menu.



Summary

- The clearer and more concise the text, the fewer the words, the less the cost, and the greater the readability and usability.
- Editors are uniquely qualified to perform word reduction.
- Word reduction produces a quantifiable result that directly relates editorial time to cost savings.
- Word-reduction strategies address a variety of issues—from individual words to sentences to paragraphs to units of text (such as tables, lists, and procedures) to chunks of content.

Truman Capote: I believe more
in the scissors than I do in the
pencil.





Thank you!

I welcome your suggestions,
comments, and questions:

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