Concision
Five Strategies for Clear and Direct Communication

Concision is a principle of effective communication. Writing that **clearly and directly emphasizes the bottom line** helps readers easily recognize and understand your main point. In fact, research shows that "not getting to the point quickly" is perceived as more negative than most grammatical errors.[1] Thus, try to eliminate unnecessary words, sentences, or paragraphs. Take out what you don't need.

Strategy 1: Emphasize the bottom line*
The best way to concisely express your ideas is to identify and emphasize your "bottom line," the main idea of your paragraph or text; *the most important information a reader should get from your text.*

To identify/ articulate the bottom line:
- Cover up your paragraph and write your main argument/claim in just *one sentence*
- Alternately, cover your entire document and write your main claim in just one paragraph
- For individual sentences, really force yourself to identify the purpose of the sentence; why did you include that information?

Emphasize that main idea in strategic places:
- Begin a paragraph with your bottom line in the topic sentence (see thesis-topic sentence handout)
- Ensure that every sentence in the paragraph is contributing to that bottom line
- Use headings and captions of tables and figures to reinforce the bottom line
- Clearly state the bottom line in your abstract and/or introduction and conclusion

Eliminate unnecessary ideas*
- *Eliminate any ideas, sentences or paragraphs that are not necessary* to build that idea.
- What counts as 'necessary' will depend on your purpose and/or audience.

Strategy 2: Reduce Prepositions
A preposition is a word that points out a basic relationship between a noun and other parts of the sentence: *at, of, for, by, as, to, from, on, out, in.* Eliminating prepositions can cut your word count and make your writing more direct.

Numerous prepositions	*Reduced prepositions*
The class in programming (4 words)	The programming class (3 words)
The plan of the building (4 words)	The building plan (3 words)
Bob can deduct the $23,000 *for* the cost *of* the pool *at* the new home *as* a medical expense. (19 words)	Bob can deduct the $23,000 cost *of* the new home's pool *as* a medical expense. (15 words)
One *of* the goals *in* the policy statement *for* our company is that *of* the importance *of* fairness *in* the treatment of employees. (23 words)	Our workers' policy statement emphasizes fair treatment *of* employees. (9 words)

[1] Hairston, Maxine "Not All Errors Are Created Equal: Nonacademic Readers in the Professions Respond to Lapses in Usage." *College English* 43.8 (1981): 796-806; Gilsdorf Jeanette and Don Leonard. "Big Stuff, Little Stuff: A Decennial Measurement of Executives' and Academics' Reactions to Questionable Usage Element." *Journal of Business Communication* 38.4 (2001):439-475.
For further research, see Joseph Williams' *Style: The basics of clarity and grace* (2006) and Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style* (1999).

Strategy 3: Convert "ion" nouns (i.e. nominalizations) to verbs
A nominalization is the use of a word that is not a noun (often a verb) as a noun. Nominalizations can create unnecessarily complex constructions. Try to make sure your verb is acting like a verb, i.e., is conveying action.

Nominalization	*Verb*
The **customization** of the logo is done by the designers. (10 words)	The designers **customize** the logo. (5 words)
The **prioritization** of classes is made by the students. (9 words)	Students **prioritize** classes. (3 words)
Utilization of the data is done by the scientists. (9 words)	The scientists **utilize** the data. (5 words)
Indication of dangerous roads is marked by bad weather. (9 words)	Bad weather **indicates** dangerous road conditions. (6 words)
Connectivity of users across the world is a result of the internet. (12 words)	The internet **connects** users across the world. (7 words)

Strategy 4: Cut expletive constructions
Expletive constructions *(it is, there are, it was, there were)* can often be replaced with stronger verbs. Make sure your verb is acting like a verb, i.e., conveying action.

It is expected that by the year 2000, the Library of Congress will have digitized 5 million books and images. (20 words)	The Library of Congress **expects** to have digitized 5 million books and images by the year 2000. (17 words)
When **there is** a very strong build-up at the front of the plane, **it is** what is known as a shock wave. (22 words)	A very strong build-up at the front of a plane is known as a shock wave. (16 words)

Strategy 5: Use active voice
Using the active voice can sometimes enhance concision. Generally, the active voice puts more emphasis on the person or *agent* doing the action (common in the humanities), while the passive voice emphasizes the *action* performed (common in the sciences).

> Note: Some disciplines DO prefer the passive voice (e.g., Experiments were conducted…) to the active voice (e.g., We conducted experiments…). Consult journals in your field, consider your purpose, or ask your professor which style is most appropriate.

Passive voice	*Active voice*
The report **was prepared** by the committee. (7 words)	The committee **prepared** the report. (5 words)
The library computer thief **was caught** by the campus police. (10 words)	Campus police **caught** the library computer thief. (7 words)