**Wordiness**

This handout provides advice for tightening up your language. Use is it to sharpen a final draft.

1. Watch your **sentence length and sentence order**.

* Be wary of one long sentence after another. Cushion long sentences with short sentences.
* Avoid wasteful openings like “There are . . .”; “It is . . . that . . .”; "What is important

is . . . “; “An example is when . . .”; “There is a . . . that . . .”; “That he was concerned was . . . .”; “it is that it was . . .”

2. Use **strong verbs.**

* Watch out for to-be-verbs replacing unique verbs.
* Watch out for to-be-verbs plus nominalizations (nouns that could be verbs).
* Watch out for "space-holder" verbs—*make, do, put, hold, show, give, come to, reach, find, show—*when they latch onto nominalizations.

3. Use **strong** **subjects.**

* Watch out for passives that create weak or unclear subjects. Be especially concerned with passives that have a strong “by” built in: The baseball was hit (e.g. *by* . . . somebody with a name, probably.)
* Watch out for abstract or inanimate subjects when you can provide animate ones. Be especially wary of general subjects like “nature” or “society.”
* If you know the identity of “one” or “the author” or “the reader” or “the audience,” use his, her, or their name.

4. Avoid **clutter***.*

* Especially watch out for clutter that comes from *prepositions* (and prepositions with *nominalizations).*
* Watch out for useless modifiers like “very,” “surely,” “truly,” and “really.”
* Watch out for vague modifiers that basically mean “I’m emoting about this”—*awesome, wonderful, fine, beautiful, lovely, interesting, creative, fantastic, super.*
* Watch out for exaggerated claims (*all, every, never, completely, exact opposite)*.
* Be careful with negatives. (“His view was not unreasonable."🡪 "His view was reasonable.”) Stack up two or more negatives in a sentence and you’ll make that sentence unreadable—e.g. “He was not unhappy to not be going,” or “Barton never was not unhappy not going to the dance.”

“*So the writer who breeds more words than he needs, is making a chore for the reader who reads*.” –Dr. Seuss