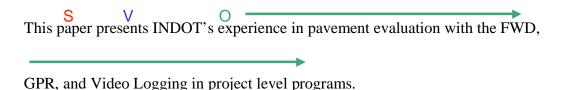
Purdue University Writing Lab Indiana Department of Transportation Workshop Series | Dr. Linda Bergmann, Allen Brizee

Eliminating Unnecessary Words

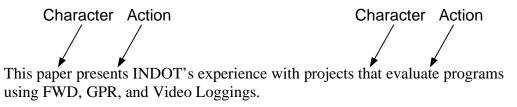
This handout explains how to eliminate unnecessary words to improve the clarity and conciseness of your language.

Clarity and Conciseness Work Together

Written English is most clear and concise when it follows the **subject-verb-object** (S-V-O) pattern. Subjects, verbs, and objects work as fixed sentence elements:



Sentences also contain movable story elements, such as the character/agent/doer, action, and receiver/goal:



If possible, sentences should follow the S-V-O pattern and actions should be placed in verbs. Avoid *nominalizing* your verbs. When you nominalize a verb, you turn it into a noun.

- present presentation
- evaluate evaluation
- investigate investigation
- discover discovery
- perform performance
- impair impairment
- to change a change

Nominalizing verbs sometimes makes writers use unnecessary or empty words, which can decrease the clarity and conciseness of sentences. Use verbs—not verbs nominalized into nouns—to express action:

Nominalized: The data **are** proof **of** the thesis. Better: The data **prove** the thesis.

Nominalized: **There was** committee agreement.

Better: The committee **agreed**.

Purdue University Writing Lab Indiana Department of Transportation Workshop Series | Dr. Linda Bergmann, Allen Brizee

Another way to eliminate unnecessary words is to eliminate words and phrases that do not carry much meaning:

Unnecessary

It is widely known that the engineers at Sandia Labs have become active participants in the Search and Rescue operations in most years. (Word count: 23)

Better: In recent years, engineers at Sandia Labs have regularly participated in the Search and Rescue operations. (New word count: 16)

Notice that an S-V-O correction has also been made.

You may also combine sentences to eliminate unnecessary repetition:

Repetitive information: Results of the field tests showed that weather conditions accelerated road wear in a surprisingly short amount of time. Results of the tests revealed that weather conditions reduced the surface quality of concrete more quickly than asphalt. (36 words)

Better: Results of field tests showed that weather conditions accelerated road wear quickly, reducing the surface quality of the concrete more quickly than of asphalt. (23 words)

Practice Writing Clear, Concise Prose

How many words can you eliminate without changing the meaning and intent of the paragraph? Remember that **conciseness** means saying what you mean in the most economical way, *not cutting meaning*.

There are various alternatives for Portland Cement Concrete (PCC) rehabilitation techniques. Some of these techniques are commonly used in Indiana. These are: overlay, crack-and-seat with overlay, break-and-seat with overlay, and total reconstruction. The selection of alternatives primarily depends on the pavement type and its existing condition. Among these alternatives, HMA overlays rubblized PCC is considered to be the most common type of PCC rehabilitation. In this technique, the concrete PCC slab is reduced in-place to approximately aggregate base material size. (80 Words)