Writing Concisely: Eliminating Wordiness

In his book, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*, Joseph M. Williams gives two tips for improving concision:

1. Usually, compress what you mean into the fewest words.
2. Don't state what your reader can easily infer.

These two tips, as well as the following guidelines, will ensure that your prose is crisp, clear, and concise.

1. Eliminate unnecessary wind-ups and empty phrasing.
An empty word or phrase can be cut with little or no loss of meaning. An inflated phrase can (and should) be reduced to a word or two.

Inflated	Concise
Along the lines of	Like
At the present time	Now, Currently
Because of the fact that	Because
By means of	By
Due to the fact that	Because
For the reaons that	Because
In order to	To
In spite of the fact that	Although, Though
In the event that	If
Until such time as	Until

Example: <u>Due to the fact that</u> Ursula babysat every Thursday evening, she could not attend Michael's recital.

Because Ursula babysat every Thursday evening, she could not attend Michael's recital.

2. Watch for redundant pairs – choose the best option.
We often use redundant pairs in speech. Be aware that they can creep into your writing and disrupt your flow of ideas. When you identify redundant pairs, choose the word that best expresses what you're trying to say.

Example: full and complete   first and foremost
true and accurate   any and all
hopes and desires   so on and so forth
each and every

The committee's <u>first and foremost</u> goal is to strategize ways to eliminate excess spending.

The committee's **foremost** goal is to strategize ways to eliminate excess spending.

3. Eliminate meaningless modifiers.

In speech, we frequently use meaningless modifiers. These include *kind of , really, basically, definitely, pratically, actually, virtually, generally, certain, particular, individual, given, various, different, specific, for all intents and purposes.*

Example: <u>For all intents and purposes</u>, American industrial productivity <u>generally</u> depends on <u>certain</u> factors that are <u>really</u> more psychological <u>in kind</u> than of <u>any given</u> technological aspect.

American industrial productivity depends more on psychology than on technology.

4. Rephrase negatives into affirmatives.

Writing in the negative and in the affirmative almost always yields the same meaning. Therefore, use the affirmative to be more direct and concise. Check it out:

Example: Do not write in the negative.
Write in the affirmative.

Rephrasing negatives into affirmatives is easy. See the following examples.

Negative	Affirmative
not many	few
not the same	different
not different	alike/similar
does not have	lacks
did not stay	left
not old enough	too young
not possible	impossible
not able	unable
not certain	uncertain

Example: <u>Not many</u> parishioners commented that Father Donnelly <u>does not have</u> the same charisma as Father Marks.

Few parishioners commented that Father Donnelly **lacks** Father Marks' charisma.