



Clarity and Conciseness

These guidelines and examples will help you achieve clarity and conciseness, two characteristics of strong writing.

Avoid ambiguity. Use words that fit with your meaning exactly and convey your position precisely.

Vague: When I saw her *tiny* hands, I realized how *small* she was.
[How tiny were her hands? How small was she?]

Exact: When I saw her delicate, doll-like hands, I realized that she stood a full head shorter than most other women.

Avoid using abstract and/or general words and phrases, such as *nice, interesting, good, things, stuff, very, a lot* and *some*. Use concrete and specific words as often as you can to provide your reader with the detail she or he needs to fully understand your meaning.

Vague: In Core 102, we studied *a number of diverse, contemporary women writers*.
[Which writers did you study?]

Exact: In Core 102, we studied the works of Alice Walker, Sandra Cisneros, and Amy Tan.

Design sentences that are direct and to the point. Avoid the passive voice, unless conventions of your textual form call for it, and edit out trite words and expressions, such as *nature, manner, kind of, it seems that, as a matter of fact, in a very real sense, have a tendency to, and what I mean to say*.

Wordy: *In the event that there should be a fire*, students should move in a *quiet manner* to the doors *located* at the back of the gym.
[Extra words make this sentence more difficult to understand.]

Concise: If a fire breaks out, students should quietly proceed to the doors at the back of the gym.

Wordy: *Due to the fact* that many students go home to empty houses, *some type of* after school program *should be offered by the school*.
[Extra words and passive construction make this sentence more difficult to understand.]

Concise: Since many students go home to empty houses, the school should offer an after school program.

For more information, see chapter 16, "Conciseness," from Lynn Quitman Troyka's Handbook for Writers. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Simon & Schuster, 2002. 304-313. You might also consult *The Brief English Handbook*, *The Little Brown Handbook*, *Rules for Writers*, and the *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*.