

Concision and Cancer

Extra words are like cancer cells. They have no specific purpose; in fact, they are often completely useless. Once established, they tend to multiply until they constrict and block the fluid movement of blood or ideas.

Lack of concision occurs when we write too many words, sentences, or paragraphs.

When editing sentences and paragraphs, look out for:

“It is...”

“There is/are...”

Long separation between noun and verb (even if they do agree!)

Many prepositional phrases in a row

“Table X shows that...”

“Figure Z shows that...”

Sentences that are not directly related to the topic sentence.

When editing sections and chapters, look out for:

Stray, undeveloped paragraphs

Ideas or phrases that are repeated throughout the section or chapter

Secondary or supporting topics which are longer and more detailed than the primary topic

Do the 15% editing exercise: Select all->Tools->word count, and note the number of words. De-select, then start editing to delete 15% of the total number of words. For example, if my short essay draft contains 300 words, I would try to edit it “down” to 255 words.

Some of you may want to shoot for 20%!