

On the Job **WRITING**



BASIC EDITION

Lesson 8

In this lesson, you will learn to:

- Use fewer words
- Replace passive voice with active voice

KEEP IT SHORT

Macline works as a marketing assistant at Treehouse Models, Inc., a company that designs and packages treehouses ready to build and install. The treehouses come in all shapes and sizes. A customer can order a boat, a car, a castle, a bird's nest or any of 10 other designs.

When buyers open the 400-pound box, they find all the pieces—everything from wooden boards to screws, roofing materials and windows—even a ladder for reaching the top. Any other accessories purchased, such as a slide, swing or zip line come with the package. All the buyer needs is a tree!

Treehouse Models has enjoyed great success. Its Facebook page is full of pictures and comments from families having fun in their treehouse.

Recently, the company sent a survey to customers and asked, “*What part of the Treehouse Models experience did you*

enjoy the most?” The answers ranged from “*My children had fun picking out the treehouse design they wanted*” to “*I liked that the package was delivered directly to my home*” and “*You made my life easier by including all the parts!*”

One of Macline’s tasks as marketing assistant is to write a monthly newsletter to send to previous customers and prospective buyers. This is her fourth month for writing the newsletter, and she is planning to include some of the testimonials from customers. However, one of the vice presidents commented last month that her copy was too “wordy” and that she needed to “sharpen” what she wrote “so it is more concise.” Now, she’s stressed because she’s having a hard time deciding what to leave in and what to take out.



DEFINE IT! Concise

Being concise refers to keeping a message short and clear by eliminating unnecessary words and phrases.

WRITE LESS SO READERS WILL REMEMBER MORE

Do you know someone who can't stop talking? The person goes on and on, until, after a while, you listen only when you pick up on something interesting. The same thing happens when you use so many words when writing that your audience stops reading or only scans your document.

In business, the writing goal is to be concise. Try to become a one-page fanatic, and be ruthless in cutting what you don't need. Two famous writers have something to say about conciseness.

"I apologize for writing such a long letter, but I didn't have time to write a short one." — Mark Twain

"Never use a long word when a short one will do."
— George Orwell

The two emails below provide information about a company trip. Which is best? Why?

Version 1

Via this correspondence, I wish to inform you that we have been contacted by Eric Harris of the Green Valley Travel Agency concerning the upcoming trip. We can now release the names of employees who signed up with the tour leader to attend. (42 words)

Version 2

Eric Harris of the Green Valley Travel Agency contacted me about the company trip. We can now release the names of interested employees. (24 words)

The second version is better. It is short, simple and direct, and, therefore, easier to read.

"Via this correspondence" and *"I wish to inform you"* are unnecessary words that take up space, but do not add meaning to the message.

"who signed up with the tour leader to attend" can be replaced with *"interested."*

"aforementioned" and *"via"* are formal, outdated expressions that take up space. These are exactly the kinds of words and phrases you want to eliminate from your writing.

ACTIVE VOICE

Another reason the second version can be shorter is because it uses action verbs, instead of passive verbs. For example, *"we have been contacted by Eric Harris"* uses the passive verb *"have been"* and takes seven words. The revision in active voice, *"Eric Harris contacted me"* uses an active verb and takes only four words.

TECHNOLOGY CONNECTION



You can measure the readability of your Word documents at the Tools tab. First, choose Spelling and Grammar to check the document. Then look at the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level to see the grade level reading ability needed for what you have written. By simplifying a document, you can reduce the reading grade level.



Give serious thought to whether you talk too much. Ask yourself: Does the person I'm talking with interrupt me often? Do I talk over what other people are trying to say? If you do either of these, it's a safe bet that you use too many words when you write.

TRAIN YOURSELF TO BE CONCISE

A checklist will help as you train yourself to be concise. Compare your writing to the following list each time you prepare a written message.

- Focus on the most important points.
- Write only what's necessary.
- Avoid long sentences.
- Get rid of phrases and sentences that don't add to your meaning.
- Remove filler words and phrases in the opening sentence (is where, is when; there is, it is)
- Use action verbs whenever possible.
- Instead of connecting several ideas with "and," use *because*, *although*, *when* and *while*.

With "and":

I got promoted and I'll take you out to dinner.

Without "and":

Because I got promoted, I'll take you out to dinner.

MAKE CONCISENESS A HABIT

"Keep it short" can be developed into a writing habit. In fact, you can turn concise writing into a game. For example: Can you explain your main point in fifteen words? Ten words?



LESSON 8 ACTIVITY



Revise the following writings for conciseness by reducing each to no more than 20 words.

It has been decided that your proposal for an internship is not sufficiently in line with the qualifications as outlined in the company policy handbook. (25 words)

The schedule you submitted for the upcoming holidays we will celebrate does not provide precisely the days and time that employees will work, so I need you to revise it and provide enough information for me to make a decision regarding the schedule's feasibility. (44 words)