WRITE ENGLISH GBR

Shortening Texts

Here you can learn the basics of

- **shortening an academic text.**

An associated worksheet is also available.

General Information

When writing a paper, keeping to the word count specified by the journal is crucial. There are several ways of reducing the length of your paper. Here are some of the most useful.

Shortening at the Word Level

1. Use the active voice instead of the passive voice

   e.g., *The research was initiated by scientists from several institutes* becomes *Scientists from several institutes initiated the research.*

2. Change nouns to verbs

   e.g., *The method was improved by the introduction of a further catalyst* becomes *The method was improved by introducing a further catalyst.*

3. Reduce roundabout phrases

   e.g., *There was the possibility to re-test the sample* becomes *The sample could be re-tested.*

4. Omit unnecessary modifiers

   e.g., *The re-testing was conducted in the month of May* becomes *The re-testing was conducted in May.*

5. Remove empty modifiers and padding

   e.g., *Indeed, the results obtained were very conclusive.* becomes *The results obtained were conclusive.* *It goes without saying that figures must be correctly labelled* becomes *Figures must be correctly labelled.*

6. Reduce hedging (see Information Sheet 8: Hedging/Cautious Writing)

   e.g., *The findings could, potentially, at a later date help solve the current mystery surrounding the topic* becomes *The findings could help solve the current mystery surrounding the topic.*

7. Remove adverbs and adjectives

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e.g., *The gale-force winds are briefly described in Smith (2017)*
becomes *The gales are summarized in Smith (2017).*

8. Replace "of" by genitive "s" or compound noun

   e.g., *Section 3 describes the results of the experiments* becomes *Section 3 describes the experiments' results* or *Section 3 describes the experimental results.* Compound nouns can also be used to remove other prepositions e.g., *Treatment with steroids* becomes *Steroid treatment*

9. Remove "that" (not always possible)

   e.g., *The final discussion includes results that Smith (2017) describes* becomes *The final discussion includes results Smith (2017) describes.*

10. Change phrasal verbs (verb + preposition) to one-word alternatives

    e.g., *The experiments were carried out over several months.*
    becomes *The experiments were conducted over several months.*

Shortening at the Paragraph and Sentence Level

If your initial text has many more words than allowed, you will need more than the suggestions above. You will have to start deleting whole sentences or paragraphs. Consider whether the information in a sentence/paragraph is essential to your main message or to allowing your reader to understand your message. Save deleted passages for a later text.

Useful Resources

Wallwork, A. 2011. *English for Writing Research Papers*. Springer.

https://journal.emwa.org/writing-better/

Final Comments/Tips

- Your readers will understand that the word count for an abstract is often particularly tight. You may therefore remove many of the connecting words/phrases normally expected in the main text. For example, in the main text, you may write "*The results are only valid in specific cases. Consequently, they cannot be used in a generalized approach*". In the abstract, you could shorten this to "*The results are only valid in specific cases. They cannot be used in a generalized approach*".

- You can sometimes remove one or two words in an abstract by clever use of hyphens e.g., *long term erosion* becomes *long-term erosion*. Hyphenated words count as one word. Be consistent when using hyphens.

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