

WHY LESS IS OFTEN MORE – THE POWER OF BREVITY

~~Have you ever noticed how certain writers have an unparalleled mastery of the English language? In every sentence they craft, they never waste words, and still manage to communicate their point with a succinct grace.~~

~~Their prose is nothing short of amazing. It's economical, to the point and most of all, clear. This short and clear approach to writing attracts a lot of attention from readers at large.~~

~~Although all audiences are different and require differing approaches to produce content that appeals to them, great content across the board always shares one common element. Regardless of industry, audience or approach, all successful content exercises extreme brevity.~~

Adapted from: P. Boyle. (2016) How to say more by writing less. [Online]. Available: <http://have-a-word.com/why-brevity-is-important>.

Being able to convey a clear message while being brief is not easy to do but is a definite goal that writers in any discipline should embrace.

Considering that throughout our schooling, writing assignments have often had an attached page or word count expectation, it is not surprising that writing with brevity hasn't been of primary concern. Students often focus more on getting the "right" length to their assignments and less on giving the correct message.

So how exactly do you say more with fewer words? Letting go of the notion that longer means better is difficult for many students but with practice, everyone can become a better master of brevity. The following list, created by freelance writer and professional blogger Mustafa Khundmiri, is a great place to start the process of thinking about how to write with brevity in mind. It will help you start down the road to writing more effectively, concisely, and clearly.

EMBRACING BREVITY: HOW TO WRITE LESS AND SAY MORE

by Mustafa Khundmiri



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Brevity rules. Brevity works. Brevity is super-cool.

Why? Because it makes you a kick-ass writer. That's why.

Good, concise writing is more than just writing. It's art in its purest form. It's expressing your thoughts like no other. It's being YOU – and being you is *powerful*.

The purpose of writing is to convey a crystal clear message. But being brief with this message is not easy when you're itching to share all your ideas at once.

So how do you embrace brevity? How do you say more in fewer words? How do you edit for a tighter copy? Here's how:

1. Stick to Your Point Like the Bark to a Tree

As a writer, focus is your weapon. It gives you the mental strength to think in one single direction. And helps you stay relevant to your topic at each step.

You might have a million thoughts running through your mind. Which is okay. What's not okay is to dump anything and everything on paper.

The idea is to be laser focused, and not make a point for the heck of it. But do it only when required.

2. Quit Wasting Words

Your words are precious, and so is your reader's time. The more words you waste, the more time your reader loses.

Every needless word is junk. Junk that dilutes your writing and makes you look like a clumsy college student. Eliminating unnecessary words makes your copy leaner. It lets you speak to your readers clearly. And gives you the freedom to experiment.

Remember, when you're writing, what you take *out* is as important as what you put *in*.

So the next time you feel the urge to use words like "very", "really" and "actually", think again. You can do without them.

3. Write Like You Are Talking to a "New" Friend

The "write like you are talking to a friend" advice is common, and overrated. It comes with a baggage of junk words.

A better version of this advice would be: "write like you are talking to a *new* friend".

The reason being simple – you are more careful about what you say when talking to a new friend. You choose your words wisely. You see to it that you don't make a bad impression. Above all, you speak concisely. Now, isn't that what brevity is all about?

4. Think Value, Not Word Count

It's lame to measure the worth of your written piece by "word count". You need a better yardstick than that.

If you only focus on word count, you may end up with a long-winded, bloated write-up that fails to impress. Is that what you want? Of course not. What you want is to deliver value, without beating around the bush.

No matter what you're writing about, think in terms of value. The length of your content doesn't matter. What matters is its depth. Sometimes even a few words are enough to make an impact.

5. Say No to Passive Voice

You obviously can't say no to it all the time. But using active voice instead of passive voice makes all the difference.

Active voice example: Millions of people use Facebook.

Passive voice example: Facebook is used by millions of people.

See what I mean? Sentences written in the active voice are more concise. They're direct, energetic and keep the reader reading. Enough said.

6. Be More Precise

Replace your weak words with stronger ones. Because they make your writing more insightful and to the point.

Instead of saying, "The day was filled with exciting activities", say, "The day was eventful". Explore your vocabulary and dig out the *best* words.

You want your content to pack a punch, don't you? You want it to work. Which won't happen unless you strengthen your writing by using more precise words.

7. Balance Clarity with Brevity

Don't sacrifice clarity in the quest to achieve brevity. Having a strong balance between the two is the key.

You can't skip over essential details and leave your readers in the lurch. Or else your article's structure will come crumbling down.

It's a mistake to assume your reader knows everything. They can read your content, not your mind. So take them by hand and spell it out for them.

8. Avoid Falling in Love with Your Own Words

Every writer knows that writing is only one half of the equation. The other half is editing. In order to write well, you need to edit well.

Easier said than done, right?

After all, chopping off sentences or rewriting a whole paragraph from scratch isn't all that fun. Especially when you've fallen in love with what you've written.

The solution is to treat your words like replaceable commodities. They're only good if they add meaning to your copy. If not, feel free to remove or replace them.

9. Be a Writer First, then the Editor

Okay, we all know you want to write perfect, get the minutest details right, avoid sounding like an amateur, etc.

But who said you have to do it all in the first draft itself?

Writing is a process. It's best done when you do it in a flow. Where you put your ideas and thoughts on paper in their *raw* form. The moment you stop to edit, this flow breaks.

Understand that you are not writing in stone. Anything you write can be changed. It can be improved later on. So why limit your creative genius by interrupting your own words? It'll only prove to be stressful and time consuming.

10. Don't Sound Like a Broken Record

People like originality. Repeating yourself over and over again takes away this originality, and bores your reader to death.

When you write, don't write the same thing several times. Instead, say it once and say it meaningfully. Create a smooth reader experience, not a confusing one.

11. Use Short, Punchy Sentences

Long, wordy sentences are unhealthy for your writing. They add bulk to your copy and trigger your reader's "ignore-o-meter".

Cultivate the habit of using short, snappy sentences. They're more fun to write, easier to understand and help you convey your thoughts more clearly.

However, this doesn't mean writing long sentences is a sin. As long as you're not dragging it out, it's fine. Because a good copy is made up of both long and short sentences, mixed to create the perfect blend of words.

What Next? Practice Till Your Fingers Bleed!

Don't just sit there and whine about your lack of brevity skills. Go out there and start practicing. Put your money where your mouth is.

It's okay if you don't make sense at first. It's alright if you're a little slow. It's fine if you can't get your creative juices flowing. The point is to let yourself go and write like there's no tomorrow. Then edit ruthlessly. You know, be *merciless*.

Taken from: M. Khundmiri. (2016). Embracing Brevity: How to Write Less and Say More [Online]. Available: <http://copymatter.com/embracing-brevity>