



# Concise Academic Writing

## Redundant Pairs

**Each and every** participant was provided a form which they had to sign and return by a given date. (19 words)

In this example, we see the writer using 'redundant pairs'. These are common in English, as words were borrowed from other languages, and paired with their English equivalent to attribute meaning. In order to make this construction more concise, the writer could choose one of the pair.

**For example:** Each participant was provided a form which they had to sign and return by a given date. (17 words)

## Redundant Modifiers

Participants were permitted to take as long as they needed to **completely finish** the tasks. This was necessary as many answers asked for **past memories** and **personal opinions**. (28 words)

English has a lot of 'redundant modifiers', which are phrases that use two words that mean the same thing: typically, an adjective or adverb. In this case, we can delete these words, as the meaning is not lost without them.

**For example:** Participants were permitted to take as long as they needed to finish the tasks. This was necessary, as many answers asked for memories and opinions. (25 words)

## Redundant Categories

During this **period of time**, participants undertook tasks linked to the **educational process and activities**. Younger participants completed the tasks at an earlier time than older participants, but older participants answered in **a more accurate manner**. (36 words)

Certain words imply their category so do not need further words to explain their meaning. In this example, we are safe to assume that 'period' and 'time' can be used interchangeably. Similarly, by using a different form of a word, we can make our sentence

constructions a little wordier than they could be. In this case, 'educational process and activities' can simply be substituted for 'education' which captures the essence of all four words in one. Additionally, 'a more accurate manner' can be substituted for the adverb 'accurately'.

**For example:** During this time, participants undertook tasks linked to education. Younger participants finished earlier than older participants, but older participants answered more accurately. (22 words)

## Meaningless Modifiers

It could be inferred that the younger participants completed the **general** tasks faster than older participants, as they **really** had a closer experience to school, in terms of time elapsed since leaving, than **certain** older participants. (36 words)

Williams (1990) states that "some modifiers are verbal tics that we use almost as unconsciously as we clear our throats" (p. 118). These are words that we use without thinking in daily speech, that sometimes find their way into our academic writing. Every word in your essay should be essential; these words don't add any value or depth to our argument and are meaningless, so could be deleted for clarity and concision.

**For example:** It is possible that the younger participants completed the tasks faster than older participants, as they had left school more recently than the older participants. (25 words)

## Unnecessary Wordiness

With regards to neurocognitive **facilities**, it could also be perceived that adolescents have a greater **predilection and affinity for schemes of instruction** than their adult counterparts, due to their **employment of key faculties and intellect which had not yet deteriorated**. (40 words)

You may think that using big words makes your essay sound more academic; it doesn't! You should opt for simple language that conveys your argument in a clear way. Your reader shouldn't have to battle to detract meaning from your writing, so be mindful of this when looking for better synonyms. Simplicity can be achieved through a few substitutions.

**For example:** With regards to neurocognitive abilities, it could be said that adolescents are more attuned to educational environments than adults, as they might have more recent experience of schooling. (28 words)

## Complex Constructions

On the contrary, adult participants were **engaged in an activity** for **longer periods of time**, suggesting that they have **a stronger attention span**. (23 words)

For these constructions, a lot more consideration is needed, as grammatically, they seem fine. However, there is still room to make the construction more precise. Written English can be prone to needless explanation and elaboration that can otherwise be implied to the reader.

**For example:** However, adult participants were engaged for longer, suggesting that they are more attentive. (13 words)

## Too Much Detail!

Finally, the experiment setting might have contributed to the overall results, as the participants were asked to sit in a room with a two-way mirror **on the wall adjacent to the table. The mirror was fixed so that the participants couldn't see out, but the researcher could observe the participants**. This was important as the participants did not know that the researcher was observing them **at this point due to a two-way mirror**. (73 words)

Finding the balance between description and critical writing can be difficult. Most people will be guilty of writing an account that is far too detailed. When writing your essay, you should consider the information that is essential for your reader to know. In this case, there is far too much detail that doesn't add any real value to the argument. Also, description naturally lends itself to depth and repetition. You could try highlighting your paragraphs in colour coded themes. Then, you can examine the similar themes to make sure you haven't detailed unnecessary information or repeated information.

**For example:** Finally, the experiment setting might have contributed to the results, as the participants were placed in a room with a two-way mirror. This was important as they were unaware that the researcher was observing them. (35 words)

## References and Works Consulted

Williams, J. M. (1990) *Style: Towards clarity and grace*. Chicago, IL: University Press.