

Avoid Redundancy in Writing



Redundancy is the use of more words than are necessary to express a thought, especially the use of two expressions that mean the same thing. Such repetition works against readability and conciseness. Following are several examples of redundant expressions.

As written: The number of berries per plant were counted. (8 words)

Better: Berries per plant were counted. (5 words)

Because “determining numbers” and “counting” are the same, both “number” and “counted” should not be used.

As written: Liquid application is the most common method of applying herbicides. (10 words)

Better: Herbicides are most commonly applied as liquids. (7 words)

“Application” and “method of applying” are the same. Both terms should not be used.

As written: The leaves exhibited symptoms of bleaching. (6 words)

Better: The leaves were bleached. (4 words)

“Bleaching” was the “symptom” of the plant’s response to a treatment. Both words are not needed.

As written: Within three days of treatment, it was evident that elongation of the shoots had ceased. (15 words)

Better: Within three days of treatment, shoots ceased to elongate. (9 words)

The vague pronoun “it” means the same as the observed phenomenon, and both need not be mentioned. Moreover, if the phenomenon could be reported, it had to be evident. Thus, “it was evident that” is superfluous.

As written: The fact that weeds were controlled resulted in an increase in crop growth. (13 words)

Better: Crop growth increased because weeds were controlled. (7 words)

“The fact” and “control of weeds” are the same, and nothing is gained by using both expressions.

As written: Resistant weeds have a genetic mechanism that prevents the inhibition from occurring. (12 words)

Better: Resistant weeds have a genetic mechanism that prevents the inhibition. (10 words)

“Prevention of inhibition” and the “occurrence” are the same. The words “from occurring” add nothing to the meaning of the sentence.

In the foregoing examples, the redundancy never added information to the sentence, and therefore was always undesirable. In other cases, whether redundancy is desirable or not depends on whether the repetition adds information. Consider the following sentences.

Example with redundancy:

His particular occupation is to determine the quality of ground water. (11 words)

Alternate without redundancy:

He determines the quality of ground water. (7 words)

If the context requires that occupation be mentioned, the first example would be proper. If not, the more concise alternative would be better.

In one type of expression, repetition is very desirable. The verb “to be” can connect two nouns that mean the same thing (so-called predicate nominative) in a way that is clear and informative.

Examples:

Weeds are a serious problem in crop production.

Leafy spurge is a weed.

Harry Truman was president in 1948.

Usually, the second noun represents a specific aspect of the more general first noun. Such repetition presents information clearly and concisely, and is not redundant.

Remember:

- If without adding meaning
- An expression is repeated;
- Efficient use of words demands
- That such words be deleted.

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