

One of the biggest challenges in finalizing essays can be getting your word count down to a manageable level – after all, you've worked so hard to figure out what stories to share and you want to share everything you can about them!

The good news is, in many circumstances, there are small steps you can take to help get your word count down without seriously affecting the story you are telling. We often write the way we talk – in theory, that's okay, but in practice, that can lead to needlessly wordy sentence structure. Following you'll find some examples of ways to trim one or two words out of specific statements. It doesn't sound like much, but one or two words out of each sentence can lead to a much shorter essay!

Don't get too emotional

First, consider every qualifier – “very,” “really,” “decisively,” “extremely,” etc. In each circumstance, ask yourself, “Is this word necessary to get my point across?” Often, you will find that the enthusiasm you are trying to convey is very clear even without those words.

Similarly, “I was thrilled when...” “I was excited to...” “I was fascinated by...” Frequently, it is very clear that an experience was thrilling, exciting, or fascinating – you don't need to tell your reader so explicitly.

“To be” or not “to be”?

Look out for sentence structures that rely on the verb “to be” – often, you will find that they can be easily shortened without that verb.

I am looking for	=	I seek
The team that I am part of	=	My team
I want to be able to	=	I want the ability to
I am able to	=	I can
I was given the opportunity to	=	I received the opportunity to; I had the opportunity to

Small words

Did you ever play charades? Do you remember holding your thumb and forefinger together to signify that a word was a “small word,” such as “with,” “or,” or “the”? You’ll be amazed how many of those small words you can eliminate!

The set of requirements	=	The requirements
At the age of 10	=	At age 10
The client maximized its profits	=	The client maximized profits
Provides me with the skills	=	Provides me the skills
My experience at/with [x]	=	My [x] experience
I realized that I could	=	I realized I could
Before I can pursue [x]	=	Before I pursue [x]

One-word synonyms

Rather than using a two- to three-word phrase, you will often find that there is a way to get your point across with just one word.

In order to	=	To
In recent years	=	Recently
In addition	=	Also; Additionally
At a time	=	Simultaneously
Other people	=	Others
Skill set	=	Skills
Need to	=	Must
Takes place	=	Occurs

Other tips and tricks

When we find ourselves making the same word-count edits over and over, we try to keep track of them; some of the most common edits are below:

I will not only [x], but also [y]	=	I will do both [x] and [y]
I worked for a consulting firm called XYZ	=	I worked for XYZ, a consulting firm
9:00 in the evening	=	9:00 pm
I am doing something to help...	=	I am working to help...
It began to give me...	=	It began giving me...; It gave me...
Learned about	=	Discovered; Examined; Explored