

## Expletive Words and Phrases

### Definition

Expletives are words or phrases that do not add any structural or grammatical meaning to the sentence. These words and phrases are often referred to as **empty words**, **meaningless phrases**, or **redundant pairs** because they do not add any information to the sentence. Instead, these words simply take up space, making sentences unnecessarily wordier. Since these words and phrases do not do any work for the writer, they can be deleted from sentences without changing the overall meaning.

Empty Words	actually, really, various, virtually, basically, generally, practically, specific, particular, truly, clearly, obviously, or undoubtedly.	These words do not add meaning to the sentence and can detract from the point the writer is trying to make.
		<b>Obviously/undoubtedly</b> – If the point is obvious, why write it?
		<b>Clearly/truly</b> – A point should be clear or true without the writer assuring the reader that it is.
Meaningless Phrases	in my opinion, it is important that, it is necessary, kind of, sort of, type of, a lot of.	The meaning that these phrases hold should be apparent without the writer actually saying these words.
		<b>in my opinion</b> – As the author of the paper, the reader already knows it is the writer’s opinion.
		<b>it is important that</b> – What comes after the “that” in the sentence should stress its importance without this opening phrase. Let ideas stand on their own merit.
Redundant Pairs	final outcome, past history, free gift, sudden crisis, each individual, future plans, end result, true facts, actual truth, first and foremost, future plan, negatively frustrate, or completely overhaul	Since both of these words have the same meaning, one of them can easily be deleted (usually the adjective or adverb).
		<b>final outcome</b> – An outcome, by definition, must be final.
		<b>completely overhaul</b> – Overhaul, by definition, means to change and rework something completely.
Question-less Question Words	what or how	If you are not asking a question, a question word is unnecessary.
		<b>what</b> – The information that follows the “what” in a sentence can usually be expressed without this word.

In addition to the words and phrases mentioned above, expletives can also be found in the sentence structures below. These structures begin with *here*, *there*, or *it* and have a form of the *to be* verb as the main verb of the sentence. Many times, starting sentences with these words makes sentences less specific.

Expletive Sentence	Sentence Analysis	Rewritten Sentence
<i>There is</i> a lot to get done today	This sentence is vague – what needs to get done today?	Today, we need <i>to vacuum the living room, mop the kitchen, and scrub the bathroom.</i>
<i>It is</i> important to clean the gutters before the first rain of the season.	The importance of the information following the word “important” can be stressed with the modal “must.”	The rain gutters <i>must</i> be cleaned before the first rain of the season.

### Model

Example 1: In my opinion, it is important that all college students vote.

Example 1: College students should/must vote.

Both of the underlined phrases add no meaning to the sentence. Instead, because the writer uses these phrases at the beginning of the sentence, it takes longer to get to the main point or idea. The writer can also decide how important he or she thinks college students voting is by using different modals. “Should” suggests that the students ought to do it, while “must” indicates that the writer thinks it is a requirement.

Example 2: The future plan Congress will propose to completely overhaul the healthcare system could negatively frustrate constituents.

Example 2: The plan Congress will propose to overhaul the healthcare system could frustrate constituents.

All of the underlined phrases in this sentence are redundant pairs. The adjective “future” can be deleted because all plans must occur in the future. The adverb “completely” is not required because to overhaul means to completely rearrange. The adverb “negatively” is redundant because frustrate already carries negative connotations – can someone be positively frustrated?

Example 3: Is is necessary for us to agree upon what the decided solution is and how we should implement it.

Example 3: We must agree upon a solution and its implementation.

All of the underlined words or phrases do not add meaning to the sentence. Like the phrase “it is important that,” “it is necessary” can be replaced with a modal, such as must or should, which will stress the necessity of what is said in the sentence. “Agree upon” and “decided” are both underlined because they are redundant pairs – if they have agreed upon the solution, then they decided on it. Remember, these pairs do not need to be next to each other in order to be redundant. Finally, the underlined “what” and “how” do not add meaning to the sentence and instead make the sentence wordier.

### Exercise

Rewrite the sentences below by removing the expletive words and phrases.

1. In my opinion, it is important to always start your essay at least two weeks before it is due.
2. Obviously, something clearly needs to be done about the lack of office space.
3. The sudden crisis that has affected each and every individual within this business establishment needs to be completely solved before we can move on to our future plans of positive success.
4. There are several and numerous true facts that basically prove your claim to be wrongly believed.
5. It is necessary to know the final outcome of the play before you happily cheer.
6. There is a lot of repetition in the poem and what is interesting is that it brings up a lot of questions about the true validity of the author's argument that technology is basically negatively harming nature.
7. Actually, Mary kind of glanced at Bob when she noticed they had basically lost the battle.

### Possible Answers

1. Always start your essay at least two weeks before it is due.
2. We must do something about the lack of office space.
3. The crisis affecting the business must be solved before we can be successful.
4. Many of these facts prove that your claim is wrong.
5. You should know the outcome of the play before you cheer.
6. The repetition in the poem complicates the author's argument that technology is harming nature.
7. Mary glanced at Bob when she noticed they had lost the battle.