

## Straining out Redundancy: the Pasta Metaphor

Often, when we learn that a piece of our writing is redundant, our tendency is to delete or eliminate the redundant sentence. However, blindly cutting sentences that contain redundancies can cause a more serious problem: eliminating useful information embedded in the redundant sentence. To remove redundancy from your writing without sacrificing information, it is helpful to think of revision not as taking out the trash, but as filtering out the impurities.

### Redundancy

Redundancy occurs when you repeat information in your writing. Effective writing and concise writing are one in the same, so repeating yourself is both distracting and inefficient.

#### *What Redundancy Looks Like*

*The job market is limited for uneducated candidates (sentence one). Individuals who have never attended school have fewer skills to offer to potential employers and, therefore, are granted fewer opportunities for employment (sentence two).*

The above excerpt contains two examples of redundancy.

*The job market is limited (in sentence one) = fewer opportunities for employment (in sentence two)*

*Uneducated candidates (in sentence one) = individuals who have never attended school (in sentence two)*

Including the redundancies, the full passage is 30 words.

Now that we know redundancy is inefficient, we also know that the above example does not communicate information as clearly as it should. The second sentence repeats the first. So, how do we eliminate the redundancy?

As you can see below, deleting the second sentence eliminates the redundancy from the passage.

*The job market is limited for uneducated candidates. ~~Individuals who have never attended school have fewer skills to offer to potential employers and, therefore, are granted fewer opportunities for employment.~~*

Our 30-word passage is now only an 8-word sentence.

You may think that, in the previous example, removing the entire sentence solves the redundancy problem. However, upon a closer look, deleting the entire sentence *creates* a new problem. We have completely lost the information about *how* having fewer skills to offer employers leads to fewer opportunities for work.

How do we eliminate the redundant phrases without losing important information? The answer is to strain out the redundancy and keep the information you need.

### The Pasta Metaphor

To cook pasta, you must boil the noodles in water. Once the noodles are boiled, you do not simply dump the noodles *and* the water into the sink—you would have nothing left! Instead, you put the noodles and the water into a strainer—a process that eliminates the water without sacrificing any of the delicious pasta.

In writing, you can think of the water as redundant information, the noodles as the important information you wish to convey, and the strainer as the editing process. Let's try putting our passage through the strainer.

The job market is limited for uneducated candidates. Individuals who have never attended school have fewer skills to offer to potential employers and, therefore, are granted fewer opportunities for employment.

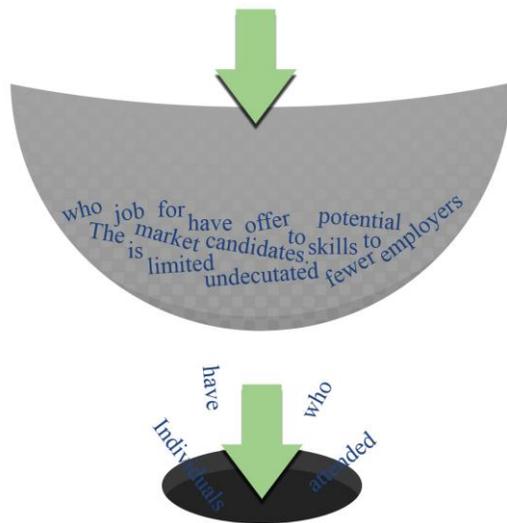


Figure 1. Useful words remain in the strainer; redundant words disappear down the drain.

When we put our passage through the strainer, as shown on the left, we are able to preserve the important pieces of information and send the redundant portions down the drain.

After we take the remaining words out of the strainer and dry them off, we are left with a concise *and* complete version of our passage:

*The job market is limited for uneducated candidates who have fewer skills to offer to potential employers.*

We've gone from 30 words to only 17, without discarding information crucial to our readers' understanding.

### Activity: Straining

Rewrite the following passage to eliminate redundancy. Be careful not to omit any important information when you strain out the redundant text.

At the Writing Center, the mission of the Writing Center is to enhance and improve the writing skills and abilities of SJSU students who are enrolled in classes at San Jose State, so they can communicate clearly in any setting (informal, academic, or professional). We want our students to be able to speak to anyone, anywhere, be it at work, in class, or on the street. We accomplish this goal through creating handouts, offering workshops, and conducting one-on-one tutoring sessions.

We are committed to treating students, their questions, and their assignments with respect. We especially want to be considerate of our students' questions and writing prompts. Our services include tutoring sessions, workshops, and tutor-created handouts. We recognize that every student is different and unique and that every assignment is different and particular to an individual course or professor. Writing Specialists will make their best attempt to work with students to improve their writing and to make their papers better. [147 words]

*Adapted from the San José State University Writing Center*

### **Answer Key for Activity**

Below, you will find one of many possible revisions to the passage from the above activity. You will notice that the word count has been cut nearly in half.

“Our mission is to enhance the writing skills of SJSU students so they can communicate clearly in any setting (informal, academic, or professional). We accomplish this goal through creating handouts, offering workshops, and conducting one-on-one tutoring sessions.

We are committed to treating students, their questions, and their assignments with respect. We recognize that every student is unique and that every assignment is different. Writing Specialists will make their best attempt to work with students to improve their writing.” [77 words]

*The San José State University Writing Center*

### **References**

"Writing Center Mission." *San Jose State University Writing Center*. Student Academic Success Services, n.d. Web. 13 Nov. 2014.

"Writing Concise Sentences." *Writing Concise Sentences*. Capital Community College Foundation, n.d. Web. 17 Dec. 2014.