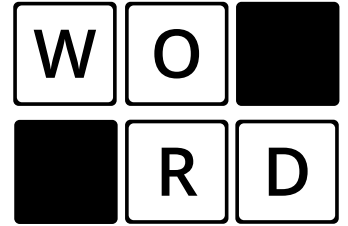


Word Choice

Word choice refers to the **wording and phrasing** a writer uses in their work. Based on the **type of writing, audience, and organization of ideas**, some strategies can help a writer choose the best wording. This handout explains word choice, commonly confused words, wordiness, and strategies for successful word choice and clarity.



What Makes Words Unclear, Awkward, or Vague?

Oftentimes, when word choice is identified as an area of improvement, it is because of one of these concerns:

Unclear Wording

- Word choice can be unclear by using vague or inaccurate language.
- Wordiness can also make writing unclear by adding too much unnecessary detail.

Awkward Wording

- Word choice can be awkward by using improper synonyms, different connotations, or loaded language that can misconstrue meaning.

Ineffective Wording

- Word choice can be ineffective by using passive verbs, clichés, and overly sophisticated language that can take away from what is being conveyed.

Examples

Loaded Language: Writers can misconstrue language by not defining their terms properly or identifying what they are talking about to their readers.

- Example: Technology makes people depressed and antisocial. For society to thrive and for mental health concerns to decrease, we must fix how we use the internet.
- Revision: Using algorithms that constantly provide instant satisfaction can make people feel isolated and negatively affect their mental health. By changing how platforms are designed and promoting better advocacy, the internet can become a place that encourages real connection instead of reducing it. [This revision is specific in how something affects something else.]

Passive Verbs: Sentences where the subject receives an action rather than performing it.

- Example: The journal is written by John.
- Revision: John wrote the journal. [This revision places the subject (John) *before* the action (wrote).]

Clichés: Generalized and overused statements that do not contribute to the meaning of a sentence.

- Example: Since the dawn of time, young girls have been pressured to adhere to beauty standards.
- Revision: Especially in the past century, young girls have been pressured to adhere to beauty standards. [This revision gives a more concrete definition of time.]

Word Choice (continued)

Commonly Confused Words

Affect Effect	Compose Comprise	Exude Allude	Eminent Imminent Immanent
Elicit Illicit	Assure Ensure Insure	Accept Except	Complement Compliment
Inhibit Exhibit	Who Whom	Assume Presume	Allusion Illusion



UNC Charlotte gives students access to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, through Atkins Library, to check definitions.

Wordiness

Wordiness refers to the sentences or sections that use **extra or inefficient words** to get a message across to the reader. Here are some examples of wordy phrases and shorter revisions:

At the present time	➔	Now
During the time that	➔	While
Has the capability to	➔	Can
For the purpose of	➔	For, So



Avoiding wordiness can be tricky. To be concise, remain in active voice, use simple terms, and keep content straightforward.



Concerning the matter of	➔	Concerning, About
At the present time	➔	Now
At that point in time	➔	Then

Word Choice (continued)

Strategies for Effective Word Choice

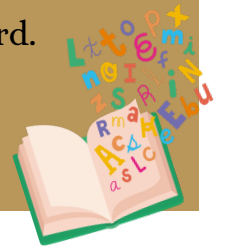
Look for Repetition: Notice if there are areas in your writing that repeat what was already discussed. Sometimes repetition, such as echoing main ideas and key terms, is helpful to the reader; however, repetition that says the same thing over again can be avoided.

- Example: They collaborated together on the project.
- Revision: They collaborated on the project.
 - “Collaborated” implies that people are working together, so “together” is not needed for the sentence to make sense.



Be Careful Using Unfamiliar Words: Sometimes writers believe that using elevated word choice will make their papers sound more academic and, therefore, better. However, writers should be wary of words they do not know well, and of looking up synonyms they are not familiar with, because meanings can be lost to the reader. To ensure words are used properly, use a dictionary and explore the etymology (origin) of a word.

- Example: The dichotomy of his personality was confusing.
 - The writer here may be using dichotomy to mean difference, when the word actually refers to two mutually exclusive but contradictory parts.



Read Your Paper Out Loud: When a writer reads their paper aloud, or has someone else read it aloud, they are more likely to identify sentences that may be clunky or difficult to say. This strategy can help writers identify areas that need to be simplified or enhanced, specifically in the word choice they use.

- Tip: After reading the paper aloud, see if you can identify the main argument of each paragraph. If something is confusing, you may need to revisit how the idea is expressed.



Consider Tone: When thinking about word choice, writers should consider the tone they want to give off to readers. Tone refers to the attitude in a piece of writing that can hint at the author’s opinion or stance on an issue. To maintain neutrality, writers should avoid discussions of their own thoughts or verbs that can indicate their feelings about something (Ex: “They strongly agreed,” “They wrongfully decided”).