

Writing Precisely and Concisely



Academic, technical and scientific writing are different from some forms of creative writing in that they should be precise and concise.

There are five easy steps to making writing precise and concise. They are

- delete unnecessary words,
- use concise forms of words,
- reduce repetition,
- state ideas more concisely, and
- paraphrase rather than quote.

Read the following example to see how the process works.

Original wording

On the surface the issue of gender inequality does not appear to be a significant social division in comparison to those divisions of ethnicity and social class. However, the invisible nature of its production and reproduction, as well as the way it is permeated through every aspect of society make the category of gender a highly discriminatory variable in very subtle ways. Gender refers to the socially constructed behaviours, attitudes and knowledge of what it means to be male or female (McLeod, 1998; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). Connell suggests that through socialisation, masculinity and femininity seem to be natural and unavoidable aspects of biological differences (cited in Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). These ideas of masculinity and femininity are present and are reproduced in all elements of society, but as McClure states (1991, p. 81) ‘few behaviours, characteristics or attitudes are actually biological or physiological few can be linked specifically to the fact that the person is male or female.’ Thus our early socialisation imposes values that we come to assume as the truth without the knowledge of the true origin of these beliefs. The nature of gender construction makes it quite difficult to change the behaviours, attitudes and characteristics we attribute to sex-based difference because of the way they permeate through every aspect of our current society. (217 words)

Surface-level editing

~~On the surface the issue of Gender inequality does not appear to be a significant social division in comparison to these divisions of ethnicity and social class. However, the invisible nature of its production and reproduction, as well as the way it is permeates through every aspect of society make the category of gender a highly discriminatory variable in very subtle ways. Gender refers to the socially constructed behaviours, attitudes and knowledge of what it means to be male or female (McLeod, 1998; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). Connell suggests that through socialisation, masculinity and femininity seem to be natural and unavoidable aspects of biological differences (cited in Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). These ideas of masculinity and femininity are present and are reproduced in all elements of society, but as McClure states (1991, p. 81) ‘few behaviours characteristics or attitudes are actually biological or physiological few can be linked specifically to the fact that the person is male or female.’ Thus our early socialisation imposes values that we come to assume as the truth without the knowledge of the true origin of these beliefs. The nature of gender construction makes it quite difficult to change the behaviours, attitudes and characteristics that we attribute to sex-based difference because of the way they permeate through every aspect of our current society. (197 words)~~

By simply deleting unnecessary articles (“a” and “the”) or omitting other repeated words, you can easily reduce your word count.

In-depth editing

Gender inequality appears to be an insignificant social division in comparison to ethnicity and social class. However, the invisible nature of its production and reproduction makes it a discriminatory, but subtle, variable. Gender refers to socially constructed behaviours, attitudes and knowledge of how we define masculinity and femininity (McLeod, 1998; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). Connell suggests that through socialisation, masculinity and femininity appear to be natural, unavoidable aspects of biological differences (cited in Gilbert & Taylor, 1991), and such ideas are present and reproduced in all elements of society. However, McClure (1991) argues, “Few behaviours, characteristics or attitudes are actually biological or physiological” (p.81) or can be linked specifically to our sex. Rather, our early socialisation shapes the pervasive belief that gender differences are the result of biological differences. This “invisible process of socialisation” makes it difficult for people to actually identify where such values are developed. (148 words, a saving of 69)

1) Use concise forms of words

For example, change “. . . does not appear to be a significant social division...” to “...appears to be an insignificant social division...”.

2) Reduce repetition

Reduced repetition of key words (e.g. cut back the number of times the word “divisions” was used).

The idea that gender “permeates through society” was mentioned in the original version three times. In the final version it is still mentioned twice, but on each occasion more concisely.

3) State ideas more concisely

Change “However, the invisible nature of its production and reproduction, as well as the way it is permeated through every aspect of society make the category of gender a highly discriminatory variable in very subtle ways.

“However, the invisible nature of its production and reproduction makes it a discriminatory, but subtle, variable.”

4) Paraphrase authors rather than directly quote to reduce the word count or reduce the amount you quote

Compare, for example, the use of the McClure quote in the original wording to the quote and paraphrase in this final version — agreed, it is only a small reduction in word count, but when you make consistent reductions over many paragraphs it all counts!