

Michael J. Dowling

Award-winning, Professional Ghostwriter & Publisher



Concise Is Nice

How to Write for Greater Impact

by Michael J. Dowling

About the Author

Michael J. Dowling helps thought leaders and other professionals write and publish non-fiction books to accomplish their goals and advance their careers.

Want to write more forcefully? Then be concise.

As Strunk and White say in their excellent book, *The Elements of Style*,

"When a sentence is made stronger, it usually becomes shorter. Thus, brevity is a by-product of vigor."

How can you write more concisely? I'll illustrate by using an actual passage from a manuscript a client asked me to edit.

Here's the original unedited text:

One of the fatal errors committed by many top executive executives is to create the vision by themselves and then hand it down with the expectation that others will execute it. While this is a common occurrence, it is a mistake.

How can we make these two sentences more concise and forceful?

Let's start by eliminating the unnecessary phrase, "One of the..."

Next, we'll replace the passive phrase "committed by" with the active verb "commit."

Finally, we'll eliminate the second sentence entirely, because it's redundant. The intransitive verb "to be" also makes it bland. (To add insult to injury, this phrase is used twice!)



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With the above observations in mind, here's how we might rewrite this passage:

Many executives commit a fatal error when they create the vision by themselves and hand it down with the expectation that others will execute it.

Presto! We've reduced the number of words by 40% and significantly increased the force of the writing, without compromising the original intent.

But we're not done yet. A second round of editing almost always yields additional benefits. In our case, we can make the sentence even stronger by –

- Cutting out wordy phrases, such as "hand it down" and "with the expectation that"
- Replacing the prepositional phrase "by themselves" with the adverb "unilaterally"
- Replacing the phrase "commit a fatal error" with the verb "err"

Here's how our second revision might read:

Many executives fatally err when they unilaterally create the vision and expect others to execute it.

Congratulations! We've eliminated 25 of the original 41 words, a reduction of 61%! And we've increased the clarity and vigor of the writing.

As someone has said, "Good writing is clear thinking made visible." For effective writing, concise is nice. But to be concise, you can't be nice. **You must edit ruthlessly!**

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About the Author

Michael J. Dowling is an award-winning ghostwriter and publisher of non-fiction books for business leaders, executive coaches, professional consultants, entrepreneurs, and other professionals. He offers turnkey services that make the writing and publishing process understandable, cost-effective, time-efficient, and enjoyable for his clients.



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Mike earned an MBA degree from Columbia Business School, where he was a Harriman Scholar, and a Bachelor of Science degree with honors from the University of Florida. Prior to founding Wool Street Publishing in 1999, he served as president of an educational publishing company, president of a national gift company, and administrator of a 1000-member church. He is the ghostwriter, author, or editor of numerous books and articles.

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