Wiping Out Wordiness

It is important for writers to be concise. Even papers with good organization and content can suffer from wordiness. Here are some strategies to help keep your paper "short and snappy":

Get rid of meaningless words:

The movie was kind of exciting; I felt that basically it captured the feeling of being in space.
Simplified: The movie was exciting; it captured the feeling of being in space.

Eliminate "doubled" words:

The president wanted each and every senator to vote.
Simplified: The president wanted every senator to vote.

Delete redundant phrases:

Santa Claus is round in shape and sharp in wit.
Simplified: Santa Claus is round and witty.

Substitute words for phrases:

In the event of a terrorist attack, there is a need for us to be calm.
Simplified: If there is a terrorist attack, we must be calm.

Change negatives to affirmatives:

It is not that often we find a small town with not many bars.
Simplified: It is rare to find a small town with few bars.

Eliminate unneeded phrases:

It has been determined that divorce rates are increasing each year.
Simplified: Divorce rates are increasing each year.

Avoid an unneeded amount of hedging:

Perhaps the study suggests that beer seems to cause brain damage.
Simplified: The study suggests that beer causes brain damage.

These principles are taken from Joseph M. Williams' book Style: Ten Lessons in

Clarity and Grace (New York: Pearson, 2005), which is available for your use in

The Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors.