

FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC
WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK

AVOID “THROAT-CLEARING” PHRASES



Avoid cluttering your writing with word-wasting expressions like “it is important to note that” or “the facts show that.” These expressions are referred to as “throat-clearing phrases” because they add little or no substance to the sentence. You can usually edit them out or shorten them without losing meaning.

One way to spot throat-clearing phrases is to watch for phrases in the form of “it is _____ that,” which often appear at the beginning of a sentence or after a dependent clause.

- *Example:* It is evident that Congress intended the courts to interpret the statute narrowly.
- *Revision:* Congress intended the courts to interpret the statute narrowly.
- *Example:* Unlike the plaintiff in Tidewater, it is clear that Smith did not possess the property openly and notoriously.
- *Revision:* Unlike the plaintiff in Tidewater, Smith did not possess the property openly and notoriously.

Another key to eliminating these phrases is to avoid expressions that instruct the reader to notice something. You generally do not need to tell your reader to pay attention to what you are writing.

- *Example:* Please note that the court did not address whether the employee was a member of professional staff to executive and management personnel.
- *Revision:* The court did not address whether the plaintiff was a member of professional staff to executive and management personnel.

For further information, including a list of common throat-clearing expressions, see Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing 84-85, 115-18 (3d ed. 2009) and Laurel Currie Oates & Anne Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook 558-59 (5th ed. 2010).