Concise writing workshop - script

At the end of this workshop, students should be able to:

- Understand the importance of conciseness when trying to write clearly/directly
- Recognize areas of confusion/wordiness in their own writing
- Correct such problem areas

Learning to write concisely is a critical skill in all curriculums. First and foremost, it provides a means to enhance the clarity of a student’s work without sacrificing content. This first rule of being clear in expressing oneself carries over from writing and extends, as a skill, into all walks of life. This workshop should introduce specific methods to removing unnecessary aspects to one’s writing, which will hone this aforementioned essential tool of expression.

[The professor would request this workshop only if students have an assignment with them on the day the workshop is given, as the workshop requires student work to serve any purpose.]

Step-by-step walk-through (workshop runtime – one hour)

1) Introduce yourself and the Academic Center, citing its usefulness in the revision process (with an emphasis on improving clarity). Also introduce the workshop itself, and what you hope the students will gain from it.

2) Begin an open discourse on concise writing. Ask students what they particularly struggle with in regards to writing “too much” or “too little”, and how they feel that has affected the clarity of their papers in the past. Write these problem areas on the board.

3) Follow up with another brief discussion on possible solutions. Ask: how might we deal with these issues and how they pertain to losing clarity in our writing?
   At the tutor’s discretion, mention preliminary organization/outlining as one of the root causes of unclear, wordy writing – for example, say: “If you lack a solid game plan (outline) for writing your paper, do you find your writing takes a turn for the worse as a result?” Possibly begin a discussion from there, and stress the importance of planning to deal with the problem of unclear writing.

4) After you feel the discussion has appropriately outlined problems that lead to unclear writing (and solutions to such problems), provide the strategy handout. Go over the handout in full, following the cues in the workshop itself (make sure you don’t miss the quick exercise under the prepositional phrase section).

5) After the handout has been reviewed, tell the students that they will now put this new knowledge to the test in revising their own papers.
   a) Break them into pairs.
   b) Have each student swap papers with their partner.
c) Make sure the directions for the exercise are clear to them before they begin (exercise on handout). Feel free to walk about the room and monitor their progress/answer questions.

d) After they have completed marking up their partner’s paper, instruct them further and continue to the next step of the exercise (making mutual revisions/discussing revisions amongst themselves).

[Optional – if time permits: When students feel they have completed the revision process and their subsequent one-on-one discussion regarding the revisions, go around the room asking for specific examples of wordy, unclear writing in their partner’s paper. Ask the student for the “before” and “after” of the writing (i.e., “My partner wrote this and it confused me. I suggested she change it to this to make it more clear.”)]

6) Begin to wrap up the workshop, summarizing its purpose once again and getting feedback on its usefulness (if you feel it’s appropriate).

7) Thank everyone for their attention, mention again the usefulness of the Academic Center again, and bid them farewell.