Making Repetition Count

THE ART OF USING THE SAME WORD TWICE

CDT Ava Lusskin ('22)

How many times can you repeat a word in the same sentence before it is redundant? what about in the same paragraph? in the same paper?

Trick question! There is no right answer, but every writer faces this dilemma. Deciding when repetition is effective or necessary versus when it actually turns into redundancy is a perpetual challenge.

Fortunately, there are concrete ways of thinking about this that can help. First, think about *effective* repetition as coming in three different forms: syntactic repetition (the form of your sentences), lexical (individual words), and conceptual (your ideas). On the other hand, you can use these same frameworks to spot redundancy, that is, repetition that is unintentional or simply ineffective. Specifically, this guide will walk you through different examples of lexical and conceptual redundancy in terms of spotting redundant pairs, modifiers, and categories.

Knowing when to use repetition as an effective argumentative and stylistic choice as well as when to switch it up to avoid redundancy are valuable skills. Let's get started...

Basic Definitions

How do redundancy and repetition differ? How can you recognize each in your writing? Here are some working definitions:

Redundancy is often unintentional, a by-product of going fast and not adequately revising. Eliminating redundancy will strengthen your writing by making it more exact, concise, and readable. Some common kinds of redundancy:

◊ *Redundant pairs*: two words with the same meaning used in a row

◊ *Redundant modifiers:* two words used together, but the one (the noun) already implies the other (the adjective or modifier)

◊ *Redundant categories*: one word signals a category that makes the other word redundant

Repetition, on the other hand, is all about being purposeful. Usually you'll use repetition for emphasis—to make points stick for your reader. The key frameworks here are:

◊ *Syntactic repetition:* using the same sentence structure/signposting, often to link different concepts

◊ *Lexical repetition:* using the same word throughout a section, often to build momentum

◊ *Conceptual repetition*: repeating the same idea in various ways to give texture and aid in coherence

Let's take a closer look...

Redundancy

Below are just a few common examples of redundancy that Joseph Williams, a top writing scholar, advises students to avoid. When inspecting your own work, ask yourself: *do I really need every word, or do certain words already imply the meaning of others?* Asking questions like that will help you to revise your writing for greater concision and power.

Redundant Pairs	**Redundant Modifiers**	**Redundant Categories**
⇒ Hopes and desires	⇒ True facts	⇒ Time period
⇒ Each and every	⇒ End results	⇒ Large in size

Repetition

Below are some examples of productive repetition and suggestions of when to use them.

Syntactical Repetition

⇒ **Example**: I have no firm opposition <u>to the</u> five-paragraph essay, <u>to the</u> one-sentence thesis, <u>to the</u> 'no-first-person-pronouns' rule. All can be useful.

⇒ **When to use it**: Speeches and presentations. Using similar sentence patterns allows you to emphasize certain concepts and link them together, capturing your audience's attention. In speeches and presentations, selectively using repetition in how you form the elements of your sentences helps keep the audience engaged—though you can see how this sort of repetition might risk boring a reader.

Lexical Repetition

⇒ **Example**: Colleges ought to broaden students' ideas of what is even possible for them to <u>think</u>, not teach them what to <u>think</u> or even merely how to <u>think</u>.

⇒ **When to use it**: Interviews. Make the values or terms that are most important to you unmistakable by repeating them. Perhaps surprisingly, repeating the same word often won't sound redundant at all; rather, it can help you make sharp distinctions. That's the case in this example, which offers three ways to view the purpose of a college education.

Conceptual Repetition

⇒ **Example**: It's nearly impossible to control watercolor paint once it is on the canvas; colors soak in, bleed together, have a mind of their own (*at the outset of a paragraph*)… And thus, watercolor paintings often project a sort of wild permeability for their viewers (*perhaps at the paragraph's conclusion*).

⇒ **When to use it**: Writing. Elaborating a single idea in different words across a whole paragraph or section of an essay, for instance, can add texture and depth to your concept while also ensuring cohesiveness. Here, notice how "wild permeability" is a kind of keyterm—it sums up the writer's core insight about the nature of watercolor—for which the preceding characterizations are the definition. Just remember: don't leave any gaps in your work and keep it sophisticated!

Speaking vs. Writing

A lot of times the issue of *how* to use repetition in valuable ways comes down to whether you are speaking or writing.

All of us can improve our formal and informal speech by using strategic repetition. For instance, you can use repetition to draw your listeners' attention to the parts of a speech that you want to highlight. Just as you adjust the tone of your voice to make others follow, repeat certain words or structures to do the same.

Whether giving a presentation at work, conducting a job interview, or simply engaging in an intellectual conversation, you have the power to guide the conversation!

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In writing too—whether an email, memo, or scholarly article—repetition can help draw attention to what you want to highlight. Using patterns and conceptual repetition makes the job of the reader easier, which strengthens the reception of your message.

Two tips: practice with patterns by using similar structures interspersed with unique ones; play with either directly or indirectly repeating ideas from top to bottom of your writing. Both will enhance the impact of your words.