When teaching your clients how to edit their papers, chances are you have often come across wordy, vague, and stringy constructions. Chances are you have also struggled to explain the reasons why the sentence is wordy (it goes something like, “It’s not that the sentence is too long, it just has a lot of ideas to it, you know?”). While this explanation can sometimes be helpful towards non-grammar-friendly clients, we want to move our practice forward by increasing clients’ knowledge of key strategies that can help make their sentences more concise.

The Signposts

1. **Coordinating conjunctions**
   When you see an overuse of “and,” “but,” and “or,” chances are the sentence will be stringy. Teach your clients how to limit their use of coordination by showing them how to appropriately use subordinate clauses.

2. **Passive voice/Inactive verbs**
   If you notice a client overusing “to be” constructions, go through a few sentences using the “E-prime” method, which substitutes passive constructions with active verbs. Sometimes, fixing passive constructions will require you and your client to find or create an agent for the sentence.

3. **Redundancy**
   Circle the places where redundancy occurs and ask the client to paraphrase each of them. They will then see that, essentially, both constructions carry the same information.

4. **Parallelism**
   A structure is unparallel when the items listed or coordinated are of a different grammatical category. Separate the unparallel items and point out how they are different, having the client correct once the concept is clear.

5. **Expletive constructions**
   Expletive constructions begin with “it is,” “there are,” “this is,” etc. While these are sometimes necessary for rhythm or emphasis, chances are your client will be using it to create a more complex sentence that only results in an inactive construction.

6. **Prepositional Phrases**
   An excess of prepositional phrases at the end of a sentence can take away from the momentum of the main clause, resulting in a stringy sentence. Have your client circle all prepositions and re-structure the sentence to eliminate all or most of the prepositional phrases.

Exercise: Edit the following sentence for concision using the strategies above. Below the sentence, show us how you would explain or guide your client towards the changes you make together.

The whole idea is that as much as the student learns necessary tasks at school, he or she needs to be a member of the family at home and the way to approach this is by uniting families to work together, especially parents.