

Write Tight and You Write In Style Report # 109

Write tight

Tight writing makes each word essential.

Watch out for:

That - Many appearances of *that* can be eliminated.

Which - Do you really mean *that*? (Here's the cheater's way to check: If a comma goes before it and sets the phrase off, you probably need *which*, instead of *that*.) If you really mean *that*, can it be eliminated?

In Order To - Usually, you can eliminate "in order." *Example: In order to place the call, she dialed the operator. Better: To place the call, she dialed the operator.*

By - Sometimes the word *by* signals passive voice (The ball was thrown *by* the boy). Every time *by* appears, check to be sure the sentence is active (The boy threw the ball).

To - An occasional infinitive (to be, to see, to dance, to laugh) is fine. However, check every instance to determine if you can use a more active verb and eliminate wordiness. *Examples: I looked to see if the boys were there. Better: I saw the boys. He started to dress quickly. Better: He dressed quickly.*

Could - Often *could* can be replaced with more active verbs. *Example: I could hear voices coming from the verandah. Better: Voices came from the verandah or I heard voices coming from the verandah.*

Adverbs (-ly words) - Most can be eliminated. *Example: He dressed hurriedly. Better: He jammed his arms down the shirt sleeves, slid his feet into his untied shoes, and zipped his pants while he rushed out the door.* Never make up new adverbs, either. *Example: He climbed tiredly into bed. Better: He climbed wearily into bed. Even better: Tired, he climbed into bed.* Most overused (and unnecessary) adverb: *Suddenly*

Gerunds (-ing words) - Gerunds add words and replace action verbs. *Example: The bats were banging their feet. (Better: The bats hung by their feet.)*

Due To - Use *because*

To Be - Whenever any form of *to be* appears, consider ways to eliminate it. Pick action verbs whenever possible. *Examples: She was combing her hair. Better: She combed her hair. Best: She grabbed the comb from her vanity and yanked it through her knotted hair.*

Very - Delete. Instead, consider using a precise descriptive word or phrase. *Example: He was very angry. Better: His face turned red. Veins popped out across his forehead. He spoke through clinched teeth. She was very thin. Better: She had lost so much weight her cheeks sunk in and her elbows formed balls at the joints.*

Beautiful, sexy, pretty, handsome - Avoid personal-opinion (abstract) adjectives, **except** in dialogue. Instead, describe the person, place or thing in concrete, visual terms, and let readers form personal opinions.

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