**Bad Old Adverbs**

As verbs are the strongest words, adverbs which limit verbs must be the weakest. An easy way to improve writing is to look for the adverbs and to find ways of improving the expressions so that adverbs can be eliminated.

**Adverbs Prop Up Imprecise Verbs**

When you spot an adverb in your writing, it might be a bad old adverb that props up an imprecise verb. A very common expression in beginners' writings is: "moved quickly" as in "Jack moved quickly." What exactly is Jack doing? He might be running, he might be swimming, he might be strumming a guitar or dancing. "Moved" is among the vaguest of verbs. What should the verb be? "Sprinted," "ran," "whirled": it depends up what he is doing, and only the author knows for sure. The bad old adverb "quickly" is the tip-off. Adverbs often occur where the wrong verb has been used.

"He smiled broadly." The bad old adverb indicates the wrong verb. The language is equipped with a verb that means "smiled broadly." The sentence should be revised to "He grinned." For some reason new writers seem to think the craft of writing involves sticking prettifying adverbs and adjectives into ordinary sentences. Most of the work of effective writing is that of selecting verbs and nouns which make adverbs and adjectives unnecessary.

The bad old adverb "tightly" in the expression "held tightly" should signal the author to look for a better verb: grasped, gripped, grabbed, clasped -- choosing a better verb is easy once the bad old adverb has tattled on an imprecise verb.

Bad old adverbs should stand out like beacons to warn the writer of the peril of imprecise verbs.

* teased mercilessly – taunted
* touched lovingly – caressed
* moved suspiciously – skulked
* thought deeply -- pondered, considered, deliberated
* ran quickly -- dashed, sprinted, raced
* dipped sharply – plunged
* dry thoroughly – parch
* treat carelessly – neglect
* roam aimlessly – wander
* pack tightly – cram
* want badly -- crave

**Weaselly Adverbs Hide the Action**

Among the baddest of bad old adverbs are weaselly words: "practically," "literally" (when it does not really mean "literally"), "virtually," "almost," "nearly," and so forth. Many times these adverbs are simply lies. If Bill had "practically" wrecked the car, then as a practical matter the car would be a wreck. If Susan "literally turned green with envy," then Susan might be mistaken for a walking shrub. The cause of concern here, however, is not that these words are used to mean the opposite of what they ought to mean. The problem from the writer's stand point is that verbs being modified are imprecise. "Practically wrecked the car" is an expression from a writer who has not taken the time or effort to describe what happened accurately.

What does the imprecise expression "practically wrecked the car" mean? Did the tires squeal? Did the car fishtail? Did the car skid? Was a passenger thrown against a door or the windshield? Did the car jump the curb? You see, "practically wrecked" is a poor expression in comparison to a more accurate description of what did happened, a description that will not need to be modified with a bad old adverb like "practically."

Likewise, since people don't really turn green with envy, a careful writer will tell us what Susan really ("literally") did do that indicated she was envious.

**Timid Authors Use Weaselly Adverbs**

Some other weaselly adverbs include: "apparently," "seemingly," "evidently," and so forth. "Apparently" is a word that should be saved for use in describing magic tricks; it always implies that what appears to have happened is not what in fact happened. Occasionally there are deceptive appearances, but some new writers write as if they expect everything to be an illusion. They never feel sure that a thing happened, but only that it apparently happened. Other writers, perhaps just as unsure of themselves, hope to convince us that things happened because they "evidently" happened. "Evidently" should be reserved for happenings which are not observed but which must be inferred from evidence. Reasonably confident people take the evidence of their own experience for granted, and use "evidently" when imagining the movements of a truck when only the tire tracks remain to be seen. Someone who saw the event says, "The truck ran into the Dumpster and then sped off to the west." Sherlock Holmes, who did not witness the event, says "Evidently the vehicle struck the Dumpster and then fled to the west."

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