

The Proof Angel Summary of

Tidy up your writing: March 2014

How to avoid passive verbs

One of the best ways to make your writing lively & easy to read is using active verbs. That is all very well, but how do you identify the passive verbs, and what do you do about it when you have spotted them? Find out here: <http://ow.ly/vEwiE>

De-clutter your writing

Do you clutter your writing with filler words? It is easy to slip into this habit. Here is a list of words to avoid, and some suggestions for fixing the problem:

<http://michellerafter.com/2014/01/30/exorcise-filler-words-from-your-writing/>

How to review your writing

Anyone who thinks they can write a draft & stop is an amateur. Nobody ever produces a good piece of work by starting at the beginning, working through, & stopping. It doesn't matter whether it is a report on a business matter or a novel.

Some things just need a read through & a tidy up, but other things need more consideration. Which takes time. Remember Mark Twain, who apologised for writing a long letter, saying he hadn't time to write a shorter one.

Here are some thoughts on how to go about the review process:

<http://writerswrite.co.za/ive-learned-to-stop>

One of the key factors making space between you & what you have written. It is amazing how different even a short piece looks when you come back to it fresh the following morning. For this reason, I particularly like the idea of locking your work away & giving the key to someone a safe distance away.

That removes the temptation to tinker, doesn't it?



The Proof Angel is the trading name of Sarah Perkins, freelance editor and proofreader.

Are you cluttering your writing?

The technical term is redundancy, but this article is about unnecessary words, not how to cope with economic bad times. Redundant words are the ones that don't really need to be there.

They add clutter, slow you down, and annoy people. They can be the cause of misunderstanding because readers switch off their brains. They can also make people give up on your carefully thought out content.

There are two main problems.

Problem 1: Repeating yourself.

Unless you are adding emphasis, perhaps because you suspect your audience might miss something, some phrases just labour the point. Pre-warn says no more than warn. If you are warning people, it must be before the event. And what is the point of telling someone you are going to warn someone & not bothering to tell them straight away? Isn't that just crying wolf?

When you are using a specific word or phrase, there is no need to add more. You are already using the right tool. Examples include:

- Price point is exactly the same as price.
- Unique doesn't need qualifying with very. There is only one like it in the world - that is all we need to know.

How come needless to say is always followed by something being said? Or I don't have to tell you...

Problem 2: Using unnecessary adjectives and adverbs

Both these types of words add to our enjoyment of our language. They allow us to convey an accurate picture to other people. But try this test. Replace the word with the opposite and see if it makes sense. If it does not, then the original word was not necessary. For example:

- She screamed loudly. The opposite would be she screamed quietly. That would be quite an achievement.
- His tightly clenched fist... Fists cannot be clenched loosely.

We should also be aware of overusing formulaic structures:

- Firstly, I went to ...
- Secondly, I saw....
- Twenty seventhly I went home.

The same over use of words happens in descriptions like square in shape & green in colour. As opposed to square in colour & green in shape?

Why you should eliminate words ending in wise

This post points out an easy way to remove redundant words:

<http://writejudi.wordpress.com/2013/10/24/be-wise-selectively/>

If you spot a word ending in the suffix **-wise** you can almost always delete it. The result will be a shorter, sharper sentence with no impact whatever on the meaning.

Hit your audience with the first line

It has always been important to get a reader's attention with the first line. And it is getting harder to do so:

<http://ow.ly/vQQtg>

In the light of these comments, it is interesting to read about H G Wells' views on essay writing

<http://ow.ly/vEvzB>

They say there is nothing new under the sun, don't they?

Why we should remember to avoid cliché

We all know clichés are dull. Once upon a time, they were clever and interesting, but the phrases are used so often that no one really pays attention to them any more.

So if no one pays attention, why do we use them? Sometimes it is habit. Sometimes we want to demonstrate that we know the latest jargon and are part of the crowd.

All too often, it is because we've not noticed we are doing it. This post demonstrates how bad things can get when clichés are strung together.

<http://theworldsgreatestbook.com/writing-cliches/>