15 words you should eliminate from your vocabulary to sound smarter

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themuse

Newsprint is on life support, emoji
are multiplying faster than hungry
Gremlins, and 300 million people
worldwide strive to make their point in 140 or fewer characters.
People don't have the time or the attention span to read any more words than
necessary. You want your readers to hear you out, understand your message, and
perhaps be entertained, right? Here's a list of words to eliminate to help you write
more succinctly.

1. That
It's superfluous most of the time. Open any document you've got drafted on your
desktop, and find a sentence with "that" in it. Read it out loud. Now read it again
without "that." If the sentence works without it, delete it. Also? Don't use "that"
when you refer to people. "I have several friends that live in the neighborhood."
No. No, you don't. You have friends *who*. Not friends *that*.

2. Went
I *went* to school. Or the store, or to church, or to a conference, to Vegas, wherever
it is you're inclined to go. Instead of "went," consider drove, skated, walked, ran,
flew. There are any number of ways to move from here to there. Pick one. Don't be
lazy and miss the chance to add to your story.

3. Honestly
People use "honestly" to add emphasis. The problem is, the minute you tell your
reader this particular statement is honest, you've implied the rest of your words
were not. #Awkward

4. Absolutely
Adding this word to most sentences is redundant. Something is either necessary, or
it isn't. *Absolutely* necessary doesn't make it more necessary. If you recommend an
essential course to your new employees, it's essential. Coincidentally, the definition
of essential is absolutely necessary. Chicken or egg, eh?

5. Very

Accurate adjectives don't need qualifiers. If you need to qualify it? Replace it. "Very" is intended to magnify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. What it does is makes your statement less specific. If you're very happy? Be ecstatic. If you're *very* sad, perhaps you're melancholy or depressed. Woebegone, even. Very sad is a lazy way of making your point. Another pitfall of using very as a modifier? It's subjective. *Very* cold and *very* tall mean different things to different people. Be specific. She's 6'3" and it's 13 degrees below freezing? These make your story better while also ensuring the reader understands the point you're making.

6. Really

Unless you're a Valley Girl, visiting from 1985, there's no need to use "really" to modify an adjective. Or a verb. Or an adverb. Pick a different word to make your point. And never repeat "really," or "very" for that matter. That's really, really bad writing.

If you *are* visiting from 1985? Please bring the birth certificate for my Cabbage Patch Doll on your next visit. Thanks.

7. Amazing

The word means "causing great surprise or sudden wonder." It's synonymous with wonderful, incredible, startling, marvelous, astonishing, astounding, remarkable, miraculous, surprising, mind-blowing, and staggering. You get the point, right? It's everywhere. It's in corporate slogans. It dominated the Academy Awards acceptance speeches. It's all over social media. It's discussed in pre-game shows and post-game shows.

Newsflash: If everything is *amazing*, nothing is.

8. Always

Absolutes lock the writer into a position, sound conceited and close-minded, and often open the door to criticism regarding inaccuracies. *Always* is rarely true. Unless you're giving written commands or instruction, find another word.

9. Never

See: Always.

10. Literally

"Literally" means literal. Actually happening as stated. Without exaggeration. More often than not, when the term is used, the writer means "figuratively." Whatever is happening is being described metaphorically. No one actually "waits on pins and needles." How uncomfortable would that be?

11. Just
It's a filler word and it makes your sentence weaker, not stronger. Unless you're using it as a synonym for equitable, fair, even-handed, or impartial, don't use it at all.

12. Maybe
This makes you sound uninformed, unsure of the facts you're presenting. Regardless of the topic, do the legwork, be sure, write an informed piece. The only thing you communicate when you include these words is uncertainty. If findings or events are inconclusive, then say so clearly, with explanation and with confidence.

13. Stuff
This word is casual, generic even. It serves as a placeholder for something better. If the details of the *stuff* aren't important enough to be included in the piece? Don't reference it at all. The same is true for *etc.* and *etcetera*. If you tell your reader to take your course because they'll learn a lot of *stuff*? They're likely to tell you to stuff it. Similarly, *aspect, factor, area* and other similar words are vague and have little meaning. Find a more specific word.

14. Things
See: Stuff.

15. Irregardless
This doesn't mean what you think it means, *jefe*. It means regardless. It is *literally* (see what I did there?) defined as: regardless. Don't use it. Save yourself the embarrassment.

Whether you're ghostwriting for your CEO, updating a corporate blog, selling a product, or finishing your doctoral thesis, you want to keep your reader engaged. These 15 words are a great place to start trimming the fat from your prose. Bonus? You'll sound smarter.