

4 Ways to Make Every Word Count

Excerpted from Keys to Great Writing 2000 by Stephen Wilbers, with permission from Writer's Digest Books.

Delete Redundant Modifiers

The more we hear and read certain word combinations, the more acceptable they begin to sound - and the more likely we are to use them unknowingly. Here are some commonly used redundant modifiers:

climb up	important essentials
consensus of opinion	past memories
end result	sudden crisis
future plan	terrible tragedy

When editing, look closely at your modifiers and make certain they don't repeat the meanings of the words they modify. If they do, delete them. There's no point in repeating the same idea twice.

Eliminate Unnecessary Categories

When a word implies a category, you don't need to write both the word and the category. Common redundant categories include:

at an early time = early
heavy in weight =
of a strange type =
round/square in shape =
odd in appearance =
unusual in nature =

Consolidate Redundant Word Pairings

The following pairings are common in speech, ... but they should be avoided in most forms of writing:

any and all
first and foremost
hope and desire
one and only
over and done with
peace and quiet
true and accurate
various and sundry

It's worth noting that legal writing has its own idioms of word pairs, such as aid and abet, cease and desist, full faith and credit, and pain and suffering. Try not to use them outside of a legal context.