

2. AVOID TOO MANY ADVERBS AND ADJECTIVES

We're speaking of modifiers that may sound attractive, but often add nothing. Here are examples:

young girl
 little kitten
 positive benefits
 mutual agreement
 terrible calamity
 soaring skyscraper
 serious crisis

One popular construction appears in many works of criticism:

Throughout the entire play . . .

The writer includes "entire" to increase the authority of the claim, perhaps even to imply that whatever pervades the play will burst its boundaries. But "entire" is unnecessary, and the following version suffices:

Throughout the play . . .

What other qualifiers invite cutting? Here are a few:

awfully
 highly
 mostly
 quite
 particularly
 rather
 really
 slightly
 somewhat
 truly
 very

We'll add one pet peeve of ours, a modifier that achieves both verbosity and pretension. That word is "terribly" when it is intended to denote praise, as in:

She's a terribly gifted lecturer.

"Gifted" alone does the job.

To be sure, sometimes an appropriate qualifier helps. Such is the case, for instance, when the writer seeks to be dryly ironic, as in this line from Oscar Wilde's "The Soul of Man Under Socialism":

"All authority is quite degrading."

Without "quite," the sentence languishes. With "quite," it clicks.

Our rule, however, stands: try to eliminate superfluous modifiers.

Samples for Correction:

1. A sparkling and cheerfully colored tie can really help to lighten up and brighten the somber tones of a dark black suit.
2. We were all extraordinarily shaken and upset by the awful events of the tragedy that suddenly and unexpectedly took place before we were aware of what had transpired in the vicinity of the environment around us where we were located.
3. She is a totally amazing and wonderfully discerning woman, who never ceases to take us aback and leave us stunned and overwhelmed by her surprising and remarkably perceptive insights into whatever topic happens to be under discussion at the present moment.
4. When the breezy wind is truly blowing hard and really swirling wildly in all directions from off the shore of ocean or sea waters, a golf ball hit in what seems to be a straight direction with unerring and perfect accuracy may still wander off-line hither and yon, back and forth, and every which way across the green fairway of the course.