

5. In the midst of wholesale uncertainty, confusion, and disorder, our brave and intrepid scout leader refused to surrender passively to the universal panic displayed by the rest of the members of the squad's populace, and instead maintained a cool demeanor of absolute steady calm and assurance.

3. AVOID JARGON AND BOMBAST

We understand that every field has its own terminology, and sometimes technical terms are essential to communication among professionals. Too often, however, important points are buried beneath the barrage of language.

To find examples, we turn to what may seem a surprising source: sports broadcasting, which these days has become a fount of overblown phraseology. For instance:

A football player no longer "fumbles." He now "releases the ball onto the gridiron."

A baseball player no longer "runs fast." He now "possesses excellent foot speed" or "commands superb forward velocity."

A basketball player no longer "jumps high." She now "demonstrates great vertical extension."

Why do otherwise down-to-earth commentators use such palaver? Perhaps they want to imbue their words with pseudo-scientific command. Whatever the reason, writers who use the same strategy rarely succeed.

Samples for Practice (some familiar sayings rewritten):

1. Permit somnolent canines to recline in tranquility.
2. A sparse supply of cognition is a minatory entity.
3. A cascading boulder amasses a vacuity of liverwort.
4. Allow that individual who is divested of iniquity to propel the initial apatite.

5. A plethora of cuisine commanders putrefy the victuals.

4. AVOID REDUNDANCY

Thus far we have focused on tightening word usage. Now we do the same with ideas.

Too often when writers want to emphasize a concept, they assume that restating it in different words will help. For example:

Not only did the speaker's presentation create confusion; it also left his audience bewildered and in a state of uncertainty.

"Create confusion" works well. So does "bewildered." So, for that matter, does "state of uncertainty," as would simply "uncertain."

This example may seem outlandish. Yet how often we read something like:

Unfortunately, the situation resolved badly.

Or:

As his lips moved silently, we never heard a sound.

In the first example, "unfortunately" and "resolved badly" are repetitive. In the second example, the same may be said of "silently" and "never heard a sound."

Keep in mind, though, that reaffirming an idea for emphasis may sometimes be helpful. In that case, preface the repetition with a transition so your reader understands that you are proceeding purposefully. Here are examples:

To reiterate

Again

At the risk of repetition

Once more

Samples for Practice:

1. Her performance apparently failed to move or arouse the people and listeners in the phlegmatic audience, who seemed to offer in return nothing more or less than tepid and lukewarm applause, but otherwise to all visible signs that we could discern remained in a passive and unresponsive stupor.
2. In the world of today's contemporary American society, children and young people alike continue to carry on a desperate search to look for truly authentic modern heroes whom they can look up to with respect and admiration.
3. I am often stunned and taken aback by the vainglorious boasts of athletes who guarantee before a game or contest that no matter what happens during the actual event, they are sure to emerge victorious, and that whatever the outcome of the competition turns out to be, there is no chance that they can possibly come in any lower than first.
4. One question we often ask ourselves about certain people whom we come to know is whether the talents and abilities that they possess and demonstrate with such ease and facility were inborn at birth, or whether these skills and attributes were developed through study, perseverance, and hard work over the course of their lives and experiences.
5. Reading one of Agatha Christie's stories or tales of suspense and mystery usually, in fact, very often leaves me bewildered and totally perplexed because of the incredible number of hints, clues, and red herrings that she purposefully drops carefully but casually into the narrative to confuse and puzzle the readers in her audience so as to lead them astray down the garden path about what the actual outcome of the adventure will or will not be in the end, when everything is tied together and wrapped up neatly in an orderly and clear explanation that reveals the truth of exactly what has just occurred and taken place before our very eyes in the book that we have been reading.

5. USE TRANSITIONS TO
LINK SENTENCES AND IDEAS

Imagine that each sentence of your work is a pearl. Transitions form the string that links those pearls.

Or imagine that each sentence is a short path. Transitions are the signposts that guide your reader on the overall journey.

Or imagine that . . . you get the idea.

Some transitions suggest evidence, of which you can never have too much:

For example

For instance

First (or second or third)

Consider

Some suggest similarity or contrast:

Likewise

Similarly

Furthermore

However

Nevertheless

On the other hand

To the contrary

Some suggest confirmation:

Moreover

In addition

Indeed

Equally important

Some suggest restatement:

In other words

To put the matter differently

In brief