

# 5 More Words to Look For When You're Editing Your Writing

When you're editing your work, here are five more words you should think about changing or deleting always.

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**Yes, editing your writing sometimes comes down to the specific words themselves.**

When you're in the early revising stages, you should pay attention to larger story issues, not words and sentences. Before you get to the smaller details, you want to make sure the story works as best as it can.

But later on, once your story is solid and your characters are as rich and complex as you can make them, *then* you should start paying attention to all those words that make up your story.

Earlier this month I revealed the five words I always look for in my manuscript to either change or delete...

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Those are all big no-nos. Especially "that" and "just." Those are two words you want to search for and change before you send out your work.

But of course those aren't the only words to be cognizant of when it comes to your writing. Here are five more to look for!

### **1. Then**

This is a word I use all the time in my writing, and I have no idea why. What does the word "then" really do for a sentence? How does it add anything?

My thinking sometimes is I've used "and" too much in the previous sentences, and so I want to add a "then" to differentiate this sentence from the other ones. I feel sometimes it adds better pacing to a sentence, too.

But about 99% of the time, "then" is unnecessary, it really is. Here's what you should do — take "then" out of the sentence and see if the meaning of the sentence changes at all. If it doesn't, then the word needs to go!

Example: ***She walked fast toward her car and then got inside of it.***

The truth is you don't even need that second part of the sentence. You could cut straight from your character walking to your character driving away.

But notice how "then" adds nothing there. If the sentence ended with "and got inside of it" you and your readers would understand its meaning, right?

Not every use of "then" needs to be cut from your manuscript, but cutting most of them will improve your writing considerably.

## **2. Absolutely / Completely / Totally**

I use words like these to make a *very crucial point* oftentimes in my writing. The word I use the most by far is "absolutely." I write it a lot in first drafts. I feel it gives emphasis. And like with "then," it helps with pacing issues.

Sometimes a sentence feels too bare, and adding "absolutely" or "completely" does add something to the

rhythm.

But here's the problem — words like these three are empty and unnecessary. They're like "very" and "really" in that they don't emphasize much of anything. They're placeholders for something better.

Example: ***She just left so she could totally get to the party on time.***

You might think adding "totally" there tells your reader how important it is for your character to arrive at the party on time, but all it does is make the sentence more awkward. It doesn't tell your reader much of anything.

Now, as I've said before, words like these are perfectly fine if they pop up in *dialogue* from time to time, but outside of dialogue, be wary of them.

### **3. Actually / Probably**

Similar to the previous examples, words like "actually" and even "probably" are empty words in your writing. Same goes for words like "certainly" or "virtually" or "basically." They clutter up your sentences and give your readers nothing in return.

The best of the lot is "probably" because it tells the reader *something*, at least. The word "probably" means something might not happen but will in all likelihood.

Something like “actually” though, while serviceable in dialogue, brings nothing of interest to the rest of your writing.

Example: ***She ran to her car fast actually so she could get to the party on time.***

What does “actually” add there? I guess the previous sentence could be someone assuming this female character is slow all the time, but even then, everything your characters do in your fiction is *actually happening*, so how does “actually” serve a purpose?

You should think critically about including any words in your fiction that ends in -ly. Many of them can be deleted or changed, and that’s the case with the words above.

## **4. Rather / Quite**

Here are two more words that might be even emptier than words like “absolutely” and “actually.” My journalism teacher once told me I was using the word “quite” too much and I needed to strike most of them from my writing. I didn’t understand at the time what was so wrong with “quite.” What did that damn word ever do to my journalism teacher?!?

The truth is Mr. Halcomb was right. Words like “quite” and “rather” are empty words only added to sentences for rhythm and pacing purposes. Sometimes a sentence

sounds better with one or the other there, even though neither word adds anything of value.

Example: ***She walked to her car quite fast to get to the party on time.***

In this example, "quite" serves as a placeholder for some aforementioned words like "really" or "very" or "totally." It's another shrug of a word you see in writing all the time and wonder to yourself, *why?*

Did she walk to her car fast? Or did she walk to it quite fast? Is there a difference? Nope! And when there's no difference, the word needs to go.

## **5. Any Dialogue Tag Besides Said or Asked**

Finally, we come to dialogue tags. I use them in my fiction all the time. "He said" and "she asked" help do two things — tell your reader who is speaking and help with the rhythm of the scene. You don't want your dialogue to go back and forth forever without an occasional dialogue tag to break things up.

But at the same time you want your dialogue tags to be invisible. You don't want them to stand out in a negative way to your reader.

How do tags stand out in a negative way? When you use

something other than "said" or "asked."

Example: ***"I need to get to my car so I can arrive at the party on time!" she begged.***

What else could she do here? She could "exclaim" the line or "threaten" the line or "scream" the line or "cough" the line or a hundred other hilarious examples you can come up with.

Having her "beg" that line of dialogue gives the reader more info about how she's saying the line, sure, but begging dialogue doesn't make much sense, and plus, putting "beg" there won't fully register for your reader if they're invested in the scene and the characters.

So please — use only "said" or "asked" in your dialogue tags. Doing so is a mark of a professional writer always!

**There are more words than these initial ten to look for in your writing, but start here.**

The truth is your writing will soar when you change or delete specific words like these.

You might not feel it's true when you're slowly working through your manuscript sentence by sentence. You might think to yourself, *nobody's going to pay attention to specific words, are they?*

The truth is they will, especially those gatekeepers who have the power to say yes to your work and get it published. You don't want to give them any reasons to say no. You want your writing to be its very best!

[Here's how to make 2020 your best writing year ever.](#)

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