

# Editing: Lesser Reductions, Part 1

April 14, 2008

As you compose a first draft, you let the words flow, not limiting or critiquing yourself. When you revise, you inspect the text you've slathered on the page. Last week we took the macro view of revision by reduction: deleting whole chapters, scenes, or characters. This week we'll consider lesser reductions, which include cutting paragraphs, sentences, and phrases.

Although your paragraphs and sentences may be well written, if two portions say the same thing without adding more to the point you're making, one of them can go.

## Phrases to Delete

*Appears to, seems to, as though, seemed like, and seemed as though* can often be cut. *Looks like, looks as though, it would appear that* can be converted to metaphor: "The shadows *seem to* slide across the lawn" could be stated "The shadows slide across the lawn."

## Redundancies

Theodore Cheney explains that "Redundancies are words that can be eliminated from a piece of writing, *without changing the significance of the passage.*" He lists five highfalutin words for types of redundancies:

- Tautology
- Pleonasm
- Prolixity
- Circumlocution
- Repetition

This week, we'll look at the first.

## Tautology

Tautology is saying the same thing that's already been said—needless repetition. For example:

- She wrote her own autobiography. (Who else's would she have written?)
- He falsely misrepresented the situation. (Isn't that the only way to misrepresent?)
- Recur again (Use "occur again" or simply "recur.")
- The reason was because... (Use one or the other.)
- Continue on ("On" is unnecessary.)
- Free gift (That's what gifts are.)
- Few in number (Use just "few.")
- My personal opinion (That's what an opinion is—personal.)

Next week we'll look at pleonasm.

—Lee Allen Howard

**Source:** Cheney, Theodore A. Rees. *Getting the Words Right: How to Rewrite, Edit & Revise*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 1983.