

## Editing: Lesser Reductions, Part 3

May 5, 2008

The final types of verbo­sities we'll look at this week are:

- Prolixity
- Circumlocution
- Repetition

### Prolixity

Prolixity is mentioning things not worth mentioning—irrelevant details.

For example:

She strolled down the park lane that was flanked with benches painted with green, shiny enamel, under the canopy of maple trees.

Unless the type of bench paint is significant—some kind of clue of future import—it's irrelevant. Better:

Under the canopy of maples, she strolled down the park lane that was flanked with green benches.

### Circumlocution

Circumlocution is talking around the subject, saying things the long way. An example from Cheney's *Getting the Words Right*:

"We spent all of the entire morning caulking the boat for the purpose of making it watertight. That was the first time I had ever done that job in my whole life." (17)

Whew! An editor would take one look at that sentence and slip the manuscript back in the return envelope! These 32 words could be reduced to 12:

"We spent all morning caulking the boat, a new experience for me." (18)

That's a 60 percent reduction.

### Repetition

There are times when you can use repetition for literary effect. But most repetition is unnecessary and must be revised for concision. Here's another example from Cheney, fit for a Tom Clancy tome (once revised, that is):

"The Trident submarine is the largest and most dangerous class of submarine ever seen at Groton. The Trident has a number of missile launchers aboard. Each launcher is capable of launching a MIRV." (18)

"Trident," "submarine," "launcher," and "launching" are all repetitions that could be avoided. Here's something tighter:

"The Trident is the largest and most dangerous class of submarine ever seen at Groton. Aboard are a number of missile launchers capable of firing a MIRV." (18-19)

Work to rid your writing of redundancies and verbiages, and you'll increase your chances of publishing success.

Next week we'll start looking at micro reductions.

—Lee Allen Howard

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