

TIGHTEN & LIGHTEN THE LOAD: Some things to shrink your word count

1. Cut adjectives and adverbs in favor of specific verbs. Make those verbs strong. (*Growl vs. shout.*)
2. Remove qualifying words like really, nearly, almost, and seems. Also, phrases such as “tried to,” “started to,” “began to,” or “managed to” can often be replaced with the actual action. Instead of “Started to sit up.” Use “Sat up.” We understand the process of sitting up includes a beg., middle, and end. Only use qualifiers if it is important that the action be started but never finished.
3. Jettison: just and that. “It was the gun that Rick used.” Should be: “It was the gun Rick used.”
4. *There were, it is, it was, it isn't* are usually not needed. “There were three bears sitting on chairs” is better if said, “Three bears sat on chairs.”
5. *See, hear, watch, look* may not be necessary. “He saw Mother at the door” should be “Mother stood at the door.” You do not need to filter your sentences through the narrator—we know it is the narrator doing all the seeing, feeling, hearing, etc.
6. Do you need both an attribution and an action? “*Let go of me,*” *Jessica said. She squirmed. “I’m going to tell Dad.”* Use either Jessica said or Jessica squirmed, but not both. If we know who is speaking, it should simply read: “*Let go of me.*” *Jessica squirmed.*
7. Cut *whichs*. “*She ran two blocks to school.*” NOT: “*She ran to school, which was two blocks away.*”
8. Don’t double dip. “*He stomped angrily away*” doesn’t need *angrily*. You’ve got the strong verb.
9. Two is not better than one. You don’t need a string of adjectives to get a point across.
10. Characters don’t pee in stories, i.e. we don’t need every detail. Allow time to skip ahead.
11. Don’t show and tell at the same time, e.g. “*When she saw her broken piggy bank, she cried. She was sad.*” Delete “*She was sad.*” If she’s crying, it is obvious she’s sad.
12. Cut unnecessary prepositional phrases. If there are only two people in a scene we often do not need short prepositional phrases such as “*to her,*” or “*by him.*” For ex.: “*She scooted closer.*” *Is better than “She scooted closer to him.”*
13. Use your universal “find” tool on your document for words you overuse. My main problem is “then.” A lot of people have “suddenly” all over the place. Find and eliminate or replace.