

in general	CUT
in particular	CUT
in the future	CUT
in the past	CUT
indeed	CUT
inevitably	CUT
itself	CUT
meaningful	CUT
meaningfully	CUT
namely	CUT
necessarily	CUT
needless to say	CUT
now	CUT
over time	CUT
overall	CUT
particular	CUT
particularly	CUT
per se	CUT
pretty	CUT
quite	CUT
rather	CUT
real	CUT
really	CUT
related	CUT
relatively	CUT
respectively	CUT
somewhat	CUT
specific	CUT
themselves	CUT
total	CUT
unfortunately	CUT
very	CUT

See the alphabetized entries in part II for more fat that can be trimmed from your sentences.

## Chapter 2 The Better Word

Some words are better than others because they are correct, because they are right for the audience, because they illuminate an idea for the reader, or because they are preferred by most good writers most of the time. The more often you use the better word, the better your writing will seem to others.

Because there are so many possibilities, only a few examples are given under each heading to indicate what to watch. Note that you can avoid many problems simply by referring to the dictionary, which should be at hand when you are writing or editing.

### WHAT TO PREFER

*Prefer short words to long*

accomplish	CHANGE TO	do
component	CHANGE TO	part
facilitate	TRY	ease, help, make easier
lengthy	CHANGE TO	long
utilization	TRY	use

*Prefer concrete words to abstract*

One red flag for abstraction is the suffix *-ion*. You should examine a noun ending in *-ion* to see whether it can be replaced by a concrete word.

motivation	TRY	drive
population	TRY	people
origination	TRY	source

*Prefer specific words to general*

facility	TRY	office building
lower-tract discomfort	TRY	diarrhea
natural fertilizer	TRY	cow dung
several	TRY	six
vehicle	TRY	car

*Prefer everyday language to jargon*

If you must use jargon, you should define it in parentheses on its first appearance.

adult literacy rate	TRY	percentage of people over fifteen who can read and write
discount rate	TRY	interest rate that the Fed charges banks for loans
morbidity and mortality	TRY	illness and death

*Prefer singular nouns to plural*

The distinction depends on whether you are writing about what makes up the aggregate or about the aggregate. If the second, use the singular and see how your writing improves.

benefits	TRY	benefit
costs	TRY	cost
elites	CHANGE TO	elite
expenditures	TRY	expenditure
moneys	CHANGE TO	money
pressures	TRY	pressure
revenues	TRY	revenue

But sometimes singular and plural nouns have different meanings, as with *saving* and *savings*.

See part II of this book for more plural nouns that can often be singular.

*Prefer words to symbols, initials, and abbreviations*

If you must use symbols, initials, and abbreviations, you should define them on their first appearance: for example, *the gross national product (GNP)*.

etc.	CHANGE TO	and so on, and so forth
e.g.	CHANGE TO	for example
km	CHANGE TO	kilometers
%	CHANGE TO	percent
CDR	CHANGE TO	the crude death rate

*Prefer American words and phrases to foreign*

Foreign words and phrases include British idiosyncrasies (as regards). Recommendations for the treatment of Latin words, phrases, and abbreviations are drawn together at the end of part II.

a priori	TRY	deductive(ly), presumptive(ly)
as regards	TRY	on, for, about
ceteris paribus	TRY	other things being equal

*Prefer familiar words to unfamiliar*

defalcate	TRY	embezzle
defenestrate	TRY	throw out of a window
shrewdness of gorillas	TRY	family of gorillas

## WHAT TO AVOID

*Avoid contractions*

don't	CHANGE TO	do not
here's	CHANGE TO	here is

*Avoid ugly words ending in -wise and -ize*

A few uses of the suffix *-wise* are legitimate: *clockwise*, *likewise*, *lengthwise*, and *otherwise*. Other uses border on excess, as do many uses of the suffix *-ize*.

electricitywise	CHANGE TO	about electricity
prioritize	CHANGE TO	set priorities for

*Avoid overused phrases (and fad words and slang)*

impact [as a verb]	CHANGE TO	affect, have an effect
interface	TRY	work together
bottom line	CHANGE TO	what this means
rationale	TRY	reason

### WHAT ELSE TO WATCH

#### *Watch prepositions*

Many dictionaries, in their examples of usage, offer help on preferred prepositions. Part II of this book also has solutions to some of the more common mistakes.

conform with	CHANGE TO	conform to
correspond with [by letter]	COMPARE	correspond to [match, go with]
integrate into	CHANGE TO	integrate with
investigation into	CHANGE TO	investigation of

#### *Watch seeming synonyms*

There are two opposing tendencies in American usage. One is to attach one meaning to many words, making them synonyms. The other is to reserve one meaning for one word, another for another, keeping them distinct. The first tendency is a lapse into sloth, the second a desire for precision. Part II of this book gives more extensive advice on some of the more troublesome pairs and threesomes.

among [three or more]	COMPARE	between [two or two at a time]
contemptible [deserving scorn]	COMPARE	contemptuous [scornful]
imply [suggest]	COMPARE	infer [conclude]
masterful [strong-willed]	COMPARE	masterly [skillful]

## Chapter 3 Pronoun References

Few things slow a reader down more than unclear pronoun references—signs of carelessness that quickly distract the reader from your meaning. The reader can usually divine what you mean, but only at a cost that need not be incurred. Here are two examples of the problem.

*The main problem that people run into with pronouns arises from their...*

Does *their* refer to *people* or *pronouns*? The unfolding of the sentence may or may not give the answer.

*The main problem that people run into with a pronoun is not tying it to its noun. It...*

Does *It* refer to *problem*, *pronoun*, *not tying it*, or *its noun*? Or is *It* indefinite? Again, the unfolding of the sentence may or may not give the answer.

That is why you should check each pronoun, whether personal, impersonal, relative, possessive, or substantive, to be sure that there is no question about which noun the pronoun stands for.

### AMBIGUOUS PRONOUNS

If two or three nouns vie for a pronoun, the reference is almost certain to be ambiguous. The general solutions are to repeat the noun rather than use a pronoun or to eliminate the pretenders by changing their number.

The main problem that people run into with pronouns arises from their not being tied to a noun.

CHANGE TO

The main problem that people run into with pronouns arises from a pronoun's not being tied to a noun.

OR

The main problem that a writer has with pronouns arises from their not being tied to a noun.

### DISTANT PRONOUNS

CHANGE TO

Another big problem with pronouns is introducing them at some distance from their noun. That sets the pronoun adrift. It is solved by repeating the noun that the distant pronoun stands for.

Another big problem with pronouns is introducing them at some distance from their noun. That sets the pronoun adrift. The problem is solved by repeating the noun that the distant pronoun stands for.

Or get rid of the pronoun.

CHANGE TO

Many of the world's indigenous people take a view of nature that differs strikingly from conventional attitudes. They are estimated to number more than 250 million.

Many of the world's indigenous people—estimated to number more than 250 million—take a view of nature that differs strikingly from conventional attitudes.

### PREMATURE PRONOUNS

CHANGE TO

If it is unambiguously tied to the noun it stands for, a pronoun...

If a pronoun is unambiguously tied to the noun it stands for, it...

If she wins an Oscar for her performance, Meryl Streep will be the...

CHANGE TO

If Meryl Streep wins an Oscar for her performance, she will be the...

### VAGUE PRONOUNS

If *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* are used not as adjectives, as in *This book is...*, but as pronouns, as in *This is...*, they often are vague. If there is any question, however fleeting, about what the pronoun refers to, restore the noun or create one.

CHANGE TO

Several countries have objected to recent decisions by the U.S. government to deplete its stockpile of tin. These will lodge a...

Several countries have objected to recent decisions by the U.S. government to deplete its stockpile of tin. These countries will lodge a...

CHANGE TO

The White House proposed an increase in aid to several Latin American countries. This has set off a barrage...

The White House proposed an increase in aid to several Latin American countries. This proposal has set off a barrage...

Note that such pronouns can stand alone if a verb separates them from what they stand for: *This is the reason that...*, *These are times that...*

### ILLOGICAL PRONOUNS

Some pronouns illogically stand for a noun that is implicit, not stated.

CHANGE TO

Japan's exports of cars skyrocketed in the 1970s. The main reason is their skill in production.

Japan's exports of cars skyrocketed in the 1970s. The main reason is the skill of the Japanese in production.

Other pronouns illogically stand for nouns of a different number: that is, a singular pronoun stands for a plural noun, a plural pronoun for a singular noun.

Everyone has a right to the information they need to...	CHANGE TO	All people have a right to the information they need to...
	OR	Everyone has a right to the information he or she needs to...
Neither of the sloops have their crew aboard.	CHANGE TO	Neither of the sloops has its crew aboard.

## Chapter 4 Order in the Sentence

The elements of pairs, series, and compound subjects and predicates usually appear as they come out of the writer's mind—haphazardly. Rearranging those elements from short to long and from simple to compound makes them easier for the reader to understand.

### COUNT THE SYLLABLES

letters and arts	CHANGE TO	arts and letters
oranges and pears	CHANGE TO	pears and oranges

If the number of syllables is the same, count the letters.

### COUNT THE WORDS

old-style politicians and reformers	CHANGE TO	reformers and old-style politicians
<i>Raiders of the Lost Ark, Shane, and Gone with the Wind</i>	CHANGE TO	<i>Shane, Gone with the Wind, and Raiders of the Lost Ark</i>
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth, and King Lear</i>	CHANGE TO	<i>Macbeth, King Lear, and A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
Washington, D.C., New York, and Miami	CHANGE TO	Miami, New York, and Washington, D.C.