

Clean the Clutter

Lisa M. Russell

Are you a “Word Hoarder?”

Time to remove those superfluous words. Like clutter in your home is distracting, are unnecessary words that junk up your writing. Editing your own content is difficult. We automatically fill-in the blanks and do not see the errors. At home, you tolerate the mess and eventually do not see things are piling up– until you stumble over it. In writing, we need help cleaning up our words. There is a simple tool, which most writers use to compose but never to edit. Microsoft Word has a secret.

Let MS WORD do the work for you. Adjust your autocorrect to find those words you always misspell. Remove the extra space you always put in after the period by setting up another autocorrect. But there is more WORD can do for you as you edit your content.

Use the following charts to identify potential word clutter. Use the FIND function on your computer and put it work. For each chart there are “Red Flag Words” you can use to FIND in MS WORD and tweak your sentence. This information was gleaned and revised from Ed Larson’s book, *Edit Yourself*.

SUPERFLOUOUS NOUNS

Nouns are powerful but are weakened by the clutter of a prepositional phrase

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for “the” and “of” in your FIND FUNCTION in WORD.

The field of economics	Economics
The level of wages rose	Wages rose
The process of industrialization	Industrialization
The volume of demand fell	Demand fell

Just cut these phrases out of your writing.

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for “the” and “of” in your FIND FUNCTION in WORD.

The amount of	The area of
The case of	The charater of
The concept of	The degree of
The existence of	The extent of
The field of	The form of
The idea of	The level of
The magnitude of	The nature of

FIRST CLASS OF SUPERFLOUS VERBS

These are pretenders or idle common verbs that mess with the working verbs and turn them into a noun. This formula changes the objective now to a verb and displaces the pretender.

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Do not be too zealous in this formula and use artificial verbs such as prioritize, concretize, or incentivize. Look at how you can change these WORD hogs to a cleaner clutter-free phrase.

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for “of” in your “FIND “FUNCTION in WORD.

Do a study of the effects	Study the effects
have a tendency to	Tend to
Is indicative of	indicates
Make changes in	change
Make decisions about	Decide on
Make progress toward	Progress toward
Provide a summary of	summarize
Serve to make reductions	reduce

SECOND CLASS OF SUPERFLOUS VERBS

Found in clauses that modify nouns.

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for “that is” “that are” “who are” “in” in your “FIND “FUNCTION in WORD.

The ice that is contained in	The ice in
The people who are concerned are	The people are
The argument that is included in	The argument in
The volume of demand fell	Demand fell
The task that are involved in	The task in
The people who are located in	The people in
The numbers shown in the estimates	The estimates in
Presented in the facts given in	The facts in

PREPOSITIONS THAT CAN BE REMOVED

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for various prepositions “FIND “FUNCTION in WORD.

The making of cloth	Making cloth
The manufacture of steel	Manufacturing steel
Some of the countries	Some countries
Fill up the tank	Fill the tank
Lay out the pipes	Lay the pipes

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THE OPENING “IT”

Two classes of the opening “it” points out the clutter.

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for “it” in the beginning of the sentence. “FIND “FUNCTION in WORD.

It is Richard who damaged	Richard damaged
It was Wang laboratories that engineered	Wang laboratories engineered

It appears that Cuba will...	Cuba will
It goes without saying that I...	CUT
It should be noted that I	CUT

THE OPENING THERE

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for “There are” in the beginning of the sentence. “FIND “FUNCTION in WORD.

There are some buildings that will...	Some buildings will
There are some people who are....	Some people are...

CLUTTER PREPOSITIONS

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for “to” in the beginning of the sentence. “FIND “FUNCTION in WORD.

as regards REPLACE WITH	On, for, about
As to REPLACE WITH	In, of, on, for, about
Concerning REPLACE WITH	At, of, on, for, about
In regards to REPLACE WITH	On, about
In relation to REPLACE WITH	On, about
In respect to REPLACE WITH	On, about
In terms of REPLACE WITH	As, at, by, in, of, for, with, under, through
Regarding REPLACE WITH	On, for, about
Related to REPLACE WITH	Of, on, about
Relating to REPLACE WITH	On, for, about
With reference REPLACE WITH	Of, on , for

With respect to REPLACE WITH	On, for about
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WEAK MODIFIERS

Weak modifiers, permissible perhaps once in a manuscript for emphasis, can almost always be removed with out changing the meaning of a sentence

RED FLAG WORDS: Look for “ly” “ive.” “FIND “FUNCTION in WORD.

: “ly” “ive”

CUT THESE WEAKLINGS

Active	Actively
Actual	Actually
Any	Available
Both	Careful
Carefully	Certain
Certainly	Comparative
Comparatively	Definite
Definitely	effective
Eminently	Existing
Fortunately	Herself
Himself	Hopefully
In fact	In general
In particular	In the future
In the past	Indeed
Inevitably	Itself
Meaningful	Meaningfully
Namely	Necessarily
Needless to	Say
now	
Overtime	Overall
Particular	Particularly
Per se	Pretty
Quite	Over time
Rather	Real
Really	Related
Relatively	Respectively
Somewhat	Specific
Themselves	Total
Unfortunately	very

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