

Writing Sparkeliferously: In Defense of Adverb

Contributed by
Monday, 22 January 2007

Our supreme editor, Charity Hogge of Mighty Pen Editing provides timely advice on the use of adverbs in your writing. While some may encourage you to stay away from adverbs, they definitely have their uses. Learn how adverbs can save your novel's life.

How to Write a Book Series - Adverbs Are For You

You already know them by reputation: Adverbs are bad news. Adverbs are second-class-citizen words. Use more than one adverb per page, and you'll go blind. Sound familiar?

Well, I'm here to tell you how adverbs saved my (novel's) life.

I have always been a ponderous writer. An editor by trade, I found myself plagued by second-guessing, re-reading my own fabulous paragraphs, and scouring the page for passive verbs and adverbs before I even had a plot outline. I lovingly re-wrote the few paragraphs I did have until they sparkled ... and was unable write anything over 3000 words.

It wasn't until I participated in National Novel Writing Month that I learned to write fast ... and to respect adverbs. I learned to use adverbs as place-holders while writing. Adverbs became little red flags: Felix ran awkwardly into the dark room while the bodyguards searched frantically. A hideous sentence, but I didn't worry about that. I just kept writing as Felix sprang to life, and pages and ideas flocked to the page.

The primary focus for the first draft is getting that wonderful story down on paper. Editing is easy. Edit later.

When your first draft is complete, do a Control+F ("Find") for "ly." Those "-lys" tell you, Here's a place that needs some work. Then find perfect, muscle-bound verb to take the place of your original "weak verb-adverb" construction.

Here's the rub: the writing process (creative) and the editing process (critical) originate in opposite hemispheres of the brain. It is difficult if not impossible to be both creative and critical at the same time; and even if you do manage such a feat, your creativity is compromised by criticism.

You can't be at your most creative-meaning your plot is not as fresh, your characters are not as spontaneous, and even your vocabulary isn't as sparkeliferous-if you succumb to the editing process while writing.

That hideous sentence might become: Felix stumbled into the darkened room while the bodyguards raced up the stairs behind him. No adverbs. Much better. But Felix might never have gotten to that darkened room if yours truly hadn't allowed the adverbs to get him there.

Your creative license permits you to use adverbs while you're creating, as surely as James Bond's "007" is a license to kill. Just be sure to tuck that license lovingly back in to your coat tails when the time comes to edit.

Please visit <http://www.mightypenediting.com> for information about The Mighty Pen, Ms. Hogge's editing service.