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A number of years ago I was doing a lot of copywriting... and I mean a LOT of copywriting... for an advertising agency that used freelance talent. After three months of working on occasional assignments for its high profile clients, I started getting so much work that I my fingers were flying across the keyboard 12-14 hours a day to deliver it on deadline.

Unfortunately, my fatigue and frustration with the constant time crunch led me to spending less time on each project to pay for homework and to self-edit my work—and it began to show. When one of the agency's clients pointed out some obvious "lazy" editing I had done on the company's brochure content, my project manager was not happy. The incident affected my reputation with the agency and that affected my bank account when they pulled back on sending me new assignments..

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3. Replace Descriptive Phrases

Tighten your writing by replacing descriptive phrases that follow a noun with an adjective that precedes it. For example, "People who are experienced at cooking know how to boil an egg," can be revised to "Experienced cooks know how to boil an egg."

4. Strengthen Your Verbs

Let your verbs do some heavy lifting to put more power in your sentences and eliminate extra verbiage. For example, "The report gave an analysis of employee concerns," can be more concisely written: "The report analyzed employee concerns."

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It was a humbling experience and I learned a hard lesson: sloppy copy reduces writing profits.

Maybe you are a skilled self-editor but, for those of you who are like me and need an occasional refresher to prevent your prose from running amok—whether you write marketing and web copy, books, articles or blogs—here are five ways to say more with less:

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5. Avoid Cliches

People hire writers to say something new, not something old. Rarely does using a cliché improve your prose. Avoid the temptation to communicate a thought using time-worn phrases like:

"As fresh as a daisy."
"You can't judge a book by its cover."
"As American as apple pie."
"As cool as a cucumber."
"Face the music."
"Tried and true."

7 (cont)

If you want to improve the quality of your writing, which improves your reputation and attracts profitable writing assignments, spend the time to self-edit your work.

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1. Remove Redundant Verbiage

Many redundant phrases have become so common that we use them without thinking. But that doesn't make them right. Some common offenders include:

(free) gift
an autobiography (of his life)
combine (together)
earlier (in time)
(advance) reservations
(first and) foremost
hurry (up)
lag (behind)
(new) beginning
(old) adage
(unexpected) surprise
ATM (machine)

Remove the word(s) in parentheses and you will remove the redundancy.

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2. Trim Superfluous Clutter

Closely related to redundancies are superfluous phrases, used to communicate an amount of false authority and assume general knowledge. Common culprits include:

"Needless to say..."
"It can be shown that..."
"As you can plainly see..."
"It goes without saying..."
"For all intents and purposes..."
"If you think about it..."
Superfluous phrases can lead readers to miss the point you are attempting to make. Get rid of them.