

Economising on words

Good writing is simple and easy to understand. Unnecessary words should be eliminated. If one word can replace four, use it. Look at the following ‘wordy’ example:

All of a sudden, he ran quickly to the computer. He knew it was absolutely essential to eliminate completely his very unique work which, although extremely excellent, could put him in bad danger. In the event that his enemies found and discovered what he had done, he would try to give advance warning of the catastrophic disaster that would follow.

A number of the words and phrases in this example are **tautologies**. They repeat what has already been said and are quite unnecessary. ‘Unique’ and ‘excellent’ cannot be qualified. They stand alone. Other expressions could be shortened to make the work flow. The passage could be tightened up by the removal of many extra words. Why use ‘all of a sudden’ when ‘suddenly’ will do? ‘Eliminate’ and ‘essential’ do not need to be qualified. ‘Absolutely’, ‘completely’, ‘very’, and ‘extremely’ therefore should be deleted. ‘Bad danger’, ‘advance warning’ and ‘catastrophic disaster’ are also wrong. ‘Danger’ *is* ‘bad’, a ‘warning’ always refers to the future and a ‘disaster’ *is* ‘catastrophic’. Look at the revised version:

Suddenly, he rushed to the computer. He knew it was essential to eliminate his unique work, which, although excellent, could put him in danger. If his enemies discovered what he had done, he would try to