

ABSTRACT

Words that contribute nothing to the message a sentence is communicating have no purpose being included. These contextually meaningless words are referred to as clutter. They are often redundant, pretentious, and can be excluded from a sentence with no changes made to its original meaning. Clean English must be written with consideration to every word put down, as the addition of useless words detracts from its quality.

Clutter is most often used by those attempting to come off intelligent, formal, authoritative, or those just seeking to elongate a sentence. They are the go to tactic of politicians, pseudo-intellectuals, etc. Why? So that they can cover up true meaning and confuse listeners/readers into agreement. So that they can appear like they know what they are talking about when they probably do not. Using clutter for sentence elongating is a habit widely employed by students. Examples are using the phrase “increase the effectiveness of” rather than the word “improve”, or “due to the fact that” rather than “because”.

Excess words can result in redundancy along with a hint of pompousness. While those with a poor understanding of English may be wooed, the opposite will be true of those with a decent enough understanding to realize what the writer is attempting. Clutter degrades the quality of writing, it muddies the message that should be gotten across (if there is one), and can even give the writer a bad image.

Unfortunately, clutter can become entrenched into one’s speech unnoticed. Many words and phrases that have become common culprits behind the creation of clutter have simpler equivalents. An effective method for recognizing and removing clutter is to add brackets to sentences or words that are not communicating anything useful, reread that section while overlooking any bracketed components, and judge whether what is in those brackets is needed or not in what one intends to communicate. If something can be said simpler whilst maintaining exact meaning, it is likely clutter.