

Below is a small section from C.D. Allen's *Redrum for the Writer*. If you aren't sure why adverbs are a bad thing, please read on.

From C.D. Allen's *Redrum for the Writer*:

Before you start with the fists in the air, let me first start by saying: There's is *absolutely* nothing wrong with adverbs . . . *in non-fiction writing*. Like this blog. In fact, I've taken the liberty quite *handsomely* in using them as I write this. Adverbs, to be frank, are grammatically correct devices when modifying verbs. In their proper propriety, they do just fine and even make things easier to explain.

In fiction writing, however, they do you a disservice for many reasons and I'm not sure why more writers don't treat them with bias. Instead, novice writers embrace them and thread them wherever they like, unaware that they are the devious devils that booby trap any success you could have as a writer.

No, no. Don't start with the, "But I read award-winning writers who use them . . ."
Yes, you're right. That's true.

Examples:

"No," Sephrenia said sharply. - David Eddings, *The Ruby Knight*

or

. . . *caused Giovanni to sigh heavily as he looked around the desolate and ill-furnished apartment.* -Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Rappaccini's Daughter*

BUT, if you look, you won't find many of them. Probably no more than one or two of them on a single page. Out of all the manuscripts I received for *Dark Distortions I*, there were two or even six in one paragraph in about 90% of them.

My editor-in-chief at the college told me that if he read a manuscript with more adverbs than half the total double-spaced pages of a story, then the writer has too many adverbs. That's a good rule to go by and I suggest that writers attempt making that your rule of thumb, but I have reasons for killing the adverb that should make you want to destroy them all. I'll go over some that you've might have heard before and I have one that I'm not sure anybody has mentioned out of all the articles I've read. It was sort of an epiphany I had while working on *Dark Distortions*.

Okay, the reasons.

I. Adverbs modify verbs, but most of the time it's because you have the wrong verb. And it's ALWAYS better to use the right verb rather than rely on an adverb.

He slowly ran down the road.

This one's easy. He's jogging, right? It's absurd not to be more specific.

He jogged down the road.

II. Redundancy. Holy shit, this one's probably more common than #I. Most of the time, you just don't need the adverb because you have the right verb already. If the verb already tells us how, why use up precious page space?

He rapidly ran away.

Um, I thought running was a rapid thing to do? So why is it needed? For God-sakes, just write:

He ran away.

III. Contradictions. Not as common as #I or #II, but sometimes the adverb contradicts the verb. Dude, this just doesn't make sense and I don't want to hear it or read it:

He slowly ran.

What?! Um, no. He either ran or he didn't run. Or . . .

He jogged.

IV. Swifties. This is when an adverb is used to describe how a character speaks his dialog. I'll tell you right now, if you're doing your job (and I'll get to that in a minute), they're just redundant. The way a character speaks should be judged by the situation the character is in and by what the character is saying.

"Pete. I think it's in there. I think we should go now," Jerry said nervously.

Dialog is an art form all to itself and relies on the truth of speech. If you're doing it right, then there's no need for the adverb. Jerry's nervous? Okay, how about:

"P-P-Pete! Um, um, I think we . . . I think we should, uh, go now," Jerry said.

V. The True Evil of the Adverb. Some may say that they have an adverb that doesn't fit any of the above reasons to nix it. In other words, they say they don't know how they can get rid of it without the sentence losing its meaning. I think this is where even the best writers fall into using the sucker. Point in case:

. . . caused Giovanni to sigh heavily as he looked around the desolate and ill-furnished apartment. (Nathaniel Hawthorne's Rappaccini's Daughter)

Is there an exact verb for sighing heavily? No. Is heavily redundant or does it contradict sighing? No. But it's still a bacterial evil. Since I can't bring myself to correct Hawthorne (one of my favorite authors), I'll make up another example.

Jason sighed heavily, not knowing what to expect.

There. Same adverb, same verb, just so you know I'm not cheating to make this easier on myself. Here's the problem. All adverbs thwart what fiction writers are supposed to be accomplishing. I know you've heard this one before. *Writers are supposed to SHOW, not TELL.* It's the very rule by which we writers should uphold as absolute law. And if you're using an adverb, even in this capacity, you're giving in and saying, "If I can not show, I will tell."

But do you know the difference between the two? Here, lets "tell" a story:

The car smashed loudly through the window, coming to rest in the middle of the café.

That's a good sentence, but it's boring. And way too common. Anybody could write that sentence. But as a writer, it's your job to take the reader into the eyes of a character. We need to be shown this to really feel it.

Frank felt his weight shift and before he knew it, the car was turning opposite from the way he was turning the wheel. There was shadow before the glass shattered all around him, raining with the noises of squawking tires and the blast of wood and linoleum. Frank was thrown forward. There was a sharp pain throughout him. It was only a moment afterwards, when he was able to peel his sticky eyes open, that he noticed the heavy behind-the-counter menu that had collapsed onto the hood of his car, which showed him today's special on lattes.

Not the best I've ever done, but it's far more showing than telling. And that's our job. I don't tell you he's in an accident with a café, but you get it, right?

Jason sighed heavily, not knowing what to expect.

Same thing here. To rid yourself of adverbs that defy the other reasons for getting rid of it, notice that if you stick to showing us rather than telling us, adverbs will go away. In fact, as I was writing the above paragraph, I didn't have one urge to use an adverb. So why not use that idea in reverse during editing? Let's see what we can do with Jason's heavy sigh and keep it simple . . .

Jason, his chest expanding and collapsing in great heaves, didn't know what to expect.

BLAM! I showed that bitch into Oblivion! **AND** I did it by doing what writers are **SUPPOSED TO DO.** Keeping the adverb only allows the writer to get away with professional suicide. It's a bad work ethic.

Did I not say we'd get bloody? It's redrum for the writer, baby. Good writing is about killing them dead and finding better working parts to resurrect your drafts for your own publishable monstrosity. It is the only way to make it really live.