

Editing: Micro Reductions

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In the final stages of self-editing, after you've done the heavy work of chopping and rewriting chapters, scenes, paragraphs, and sentences, it's time to get out your magnifying glass to make the following micro reductions:

- Short words for long
- Contractions
- Shorter spellings

Use Shorter Words

Always use the simplest words that will make your point. As you scour your text during the micro-reduction phase, ask if a shorter word can replace that ten-dollar one. It's usually best to use Anglo-Saxon instead of Latinate forms, for example, "shorten" instead of "abbreviate." Other substitution Cheney lists are:

Long Word	Short Word
abatement	decrease
abdicate	resign
abhorrent	disgusting, hateful
venturous	bold
vociferate	shout
voluminous	bulky

Use Contractions

Unless you're striving for a formal tone in your prose (narrative or dialogue), feel free to contract verb forms:

Long Form	Contraction
I have	I've
I am	I'm
He is	He's
Cannot	Can't

Use Shorter Spellings

There are sometimes two acceptable forms of spelling for certain words. Whenever possible, use the shorter form, especially with the following directional words:

Long Spelling	Shorter Spelling
towards	toward
forwards	forward
backwards	backward
upwards	upward
inwards	inward

Another word to shorten is “aesthetic” to “esthetic.”

Taking the skydiver’s approach to editing, start with greater reductions, move on to lesser reductions, and then finish with micro reductions. Your prose will be much tighter for the effort.

Next week we’ll begin looking at narrative modes.

–Lee Allen Howard

Source: Cheney, Theodore A. Rees. *Getting the Words Right: How to Rewrite, Edit & Revise*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer’s Digest Books, 1983.