

## Avoid Adverbs

Almost every book and writing course advises against using adverbs. I agree and believe overusing adverbs can kill a good story. Steven King describes using adverbs in another way. “I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs.”

Using adverbs in dialogue tags or internal thoughts is telling the reader what’s happening instead of showing it, and sometimes adverbs are redundant. In other words, adverbs are a lazy way of expressing action, drama, or emotion.

That said, I believe it is acceptable to have a few adverbs sprinkled here and there. But the fewer adverbs you have in your writing, the better.

### Adverb definition

Adverbs words describe or give information about the word they are modifying, such as a verb, adjective, clause, verbal phrase, or other adverbs.

Most adverbs end with “ly,” but not all of them. Some can end with “-ward” or “-wise,” such as (forward, backward, otherwise) or keep the same form as adjectives (hard, fast, right).

#### **A few common adverbs not ending in "ly":**

afterward

just

rather

backward	meanwhile	so
furthermore	most	therefore
however	much	very
indeed	otherwise	yet
instead	quite	

## Adverbs in dialogue tags

No doubt adverbs have their place when writing a story, and at times even useful. But adverbs will kill dialogue. Dialogue is where you should show movement, emotion, and body language. You want to add beats that enhance the story.

Deep POV is about removing adverbs and dialogue tags (said, questioned, asked, etc.)

### Issue: (said angrily)

*“I don’t want you here,” Joe **said angrily**.*

Angrily is vague (telling/explaining) and does not show the reader anything. What is the context or the visual image in this scene?

### Fix:

*“I don’t want you here!” Joe balled his fists and breathed hard.*

Removing the (said) tag makes the sentence better.

Replacing the adverb (angrily) with showing description

helps the reader get a better image of Joe's emotions and actions.

**Issue: (said happily)**

“Thank you for the birthday present,” Sue *said happily*.

Happily, is a vague word and communicates little. The reader gets the idea, but why not improve the sentence?

**Fix:**

“Thank you for the birthday present.” Sue wiped a tear from her eye and smiled.

This sentence gives a better description of Sue's emotions. The reader will get a better image.

**Issue: (very, totally, said sadly)**

“I am *very* sorry that I *totally* forgot to pick you up,” Joe *said sadly*.

Here the adverbs *very* and *totally* try to intensify the verbs sorry and forgot. The adverb *sadly* is vague, and it is a lazy way of describing an emotion.

**Fix:**

“I am sorry I forgot to pick you up,” Joe swallowed the knot in his throat, sighed, and dropped his gaze to the floor.

This sentence reads much better. The reader can better imagine Joe's feelings and sincerity.

## Verb and adverb combos

Using a verb to enhance an adverb is a Deep POV violation. The goal is to replace [weak verb] + [adverb] combos with a single, more descriptive verb. Doing so will make your writing tighter, more engaging, and faster-paced.

### Issue: (walked loudly)

Joe *walked loudly* up the stairs into his room.

This sentence has a [weak verb] + [adverb] combo and is wordy. This tells the reader how Joe walked. Reword to show how Joe walked.

### Fix:

Joe *stomped* up the stairs into his room.

This reads better with fewer words. The reader can better visualize how Joe goes up the stairs.

### Issue: (loudly said)

The drill sergeant *loudly said* the instructions.

This sentence has a [adverb] + [weak verb] combo. Replace with a stronger verb.

**Fix:**

The drill sergeant shouted the instructions.

Replacing the [adverb] + [weak verb] combo with a single stronger verb “shouted” makes the sentence better.

**Issue: (walked quickly)**

Joe *walked quickly* down the hallway.

How would you remove the [weak verb] + [adverb] combo without changing the meaning of the sentence?

**Fix:**

Joe hurried down the hallway.

The word hurried replaced, “walked quickly.” This sentence is less wordy, and it implies Joe’s urgency.

Here are a few more examples of strong verbs that can replace [weak verb] + [adverb] combos:

speaking loudly	shout, yell, bark
moving swiftly	speed, dart, bolt, zoom, dash, zip
hitting lightly	tap, touch
saying jokingly	joke, kid
attempting bravely	dare
performing poorly	fail, flunk, bomb
noting subtly	suggest, insinuate, imply
eating voraciously	devour, scarf, chomp

take forcefully	grab, seize, snatch
look extendedly	stare, gaze
study closely	scrutinize, inspect
do repeatedly	repeat, redo

## Redundant adverbs

Redundant adverbs tell the reader something the verb already implies. This happens when a strong verb carries the action taking place. Keep an eye out for [redundant adverb] + [verb] phrases.

### Issue: (briefly)

Joe *briefly* glanced at the wall clock.

The adverb *briefly* and the verb *glanced* are redundant. Why? The meaning of the word “*briefly*” implies taking a quick, brief, or hurried look which has the same meaning as a glance.

### Fix:

Joe glanced at the wall clock.

Removing the adverb *briefly* did not change the meaning of the sentence.

### Issue: (slowly, leisurely)

Joe and Sue strolled *slowly* and *leisurely* on the beach.

The verb strolled means walking in a slow and relaxed way, without a hurry. Which makes slowly and leisurely redundant. There is no need for these two adverbs.

**Fix:**

Joe and Sue strolled on the beach.

Removing the two adverbs does not change the meaning/content of the sentence. The sentence reads more direct and to the point.

Or.

Under the moonlight, holding hands, Joe and Sue strolled on the beach.

Same sentence with added spice.

**A few redundant adverbs:**

assert boldly

complete entirely

completely demolish

crawled slowly

hurry quickly

insist adamantly

scream loudly

shouted loudly

smash forcefully

squeezed tightly

stare intently

totally obliterate

wander aimlessly

whisper softly

**Misplaced adverbs**

You should avoid adverbs, but if you must use them, make sure the placement is correct. A misplaced adverb can change the meaning of

the sentence. If possible, put the adverb close to the verb it modifies to avoid confusion.

**Issue: (only)**

Joe and Sue *only* go to college on Wednesdays.

Here the adverb only modifies the verb go. This sentence has several potential meanings:

1. Joe and Sue go to college on Wednesdays and nowhere else.
2. If that is the case, the sentence is correct.
3. If Joe and Sue do other things on Wednesdays, this sentence is wrong.

**Issue: (rarely)**

Sue goes to Houston to visit her sister *rarely*.

The sentence is confusing with two or three potential meanings.

Does Sue go to Houston rarely?

Or does she visit her sister rarely or both?

**In Summary:**

As mentioned earlier, I believe it is acceptable to have a few adverbs sprinkled here and there. But the fewer adverbs you have in your writing, the better.

Avoid adverbs in dialogue and thought tags.

Replace adverbs in narration and inner thought with movement, emotion, and body language descriptions.

Watch for redundant adverbs that have the same meaning as the verb.

Most adverbs are not necessary. Removing the adverb will not alter the meaning of the sentence or phrase.

Watch for misplaced adverbs in a sentence that can lead to confusion.