



Weak Word List

Sastrugi Press has compiled this list of weak words from its staff and presents it to future authors. Although each of these words has their place, more often than not, a more precise word can be substituted or the word can also be removed altogether.

Manuscript editing tools:

http://www.writewords.org.uk/phrase_count.asp

<http://editminion.com/>

<http://prowritingaid.com/>

Terrible weak words (these kill your writing)

amazing
a lot
bad
good
got
get [A terrible offender!]
gotten
just [poor filler word, it creeps into text]
might
stuff
take [Another offender]
thing(s)
try
well
went
maybe

Weak words

actually (ok as a qualifier, but if it can be replaced with "in my opinion", delete "actually, see Mac dictionary thesaurus Joshua Ferris's reflections)
around
going
great
like
literally
make
maybe
nice
perhaps
pretty
quite
really [mostly deletable]
suppose
very [Mark Twain said replace 'very' with 'damn', it'll

edit out]

Words/phrases to retool and watch for

a bit
all of the sudden...
almost
are [possible tense error]
nearly
began [...] - instead of "began changing", say "changed" X
could see
created
has been = was
had gone down
had a desire
had to ... [change to simple past, complex fix]
have been...
I'm [tense error]
it's [tense error]
interesting
there are/is/were

Other weak words

all
almost
believe
big
came/come
can't
every
feel/felt (regret, etc)
fine
important
make
move
need
never
often
perhaps
quite
said
seem
small
think
try
used to
up
walk
want
were xxx (changed to simple past?)
looking up



Low confidence words and phrases

possibly
kinda
sorta
“I dunno”
“we’ll see”
“I guess”

Loose timing and approximation words

sometime
someday
later
earlier
soon
eventually
around
about
roughly

Vague verbs

acknowledge
appreciate
appear(s)
be aware of
be familiar with
be informed of
comprehend
create
describe
experience
feel
generate
illustrate
know
make
participate in
rely
recognize
undergo
understand
undertake

Passive constructions (possible)

was... (Weak: The door was slammed by the angry teenager.
Stronger: The angry teenager slammed the door.)

Weak constructions

There are...
It is...
...fact that...
...had had...
I think
I believe
I feel
was/is/are/am
Weissman advises us to replace the weak words “I think”, “I believe”, and “I feel”, for stronger options such as “I’m confident”, “I’m convinced”, “I expect”.

Using that

“That” is another word which creeps into writing. It has its place, but can be deleted without loss of meaning – usually when it’s preceded by a noun.
“This is the house that John built.”
“Do you recall the hour that we asked people to arrive?”
“I liked the design that you came up with.”

Don’t cut valid instances of “that”. When “that” comes before the noun, the construction likely works. “I need that document by four” makes sense, “I need document by four” is informal and has to be clarified by other statements.

Orientation words written from a geographic point of view that means nothing to a reader

up
down

Other words & phrases

came
might be able to
were able
were flying
would
got out of
This panicked me (passive) = I panicked