



**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://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