Word Choice

Finding the right words can be tough. Following a few simple rules on word choice can help with this editing task.

Formality

Knowing the audience can help you decide what words you should be using. If you are writing for a formal or academic audience, you would want to use a high level of formality. In these cases you want to eliminate the use of clichés, slang, texting, and colloquialisms.

Poor Example: Tony is frustrated with his grade but that is the way the cookie crumbles.

Formal Example: Tony is frustrated with his grade but he knows he could have done better.

Poor Example: Fiona loved her new crib but her peeps didn't.

Formal Example: Fiona loved her new apartment but her friends did not.

Poor Example: I want 2 see u after the game, k?

Forman Example: Can you see me after the game?

Connotation

There are plenty of words used daily that have the same meaning but convey different attitudes or feelings. The connotation of a word is the feelings connected with that word. Sometimes these are negative, and sometimes positive. Be careful of using words from the thesaurus that say they mean the same thing but may have a connotation that is inappropriate for your purpose or audience. The examples below show two words that have the same dictionary meaning but have different connotations.

Example: She is very *persistent* in her relationships.

Example: She is very *stubborn* in her relationships.

Specific Language

The more specific your words can be the better. Using words *like thing*, *kind*, *very*, and *many* are words that are vague and really have little meaning. Think about all the words used. The more specific the words are, the better the audience will understand.

Vague Example: He took his dog out for a morning walk.

Specific Example: He leashed up his miniature collie and took him out for a sunrise stroll.

Links to Additional Information

- "Word Coice" by the University of North Carolina
  http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/word_choice.html

- "Word Choice" by Purdue Online Writing Lab
  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/index.php?category_id=2&sub_category_id=2&article_id=66