

EDITOR'S CRAFT

Too, Too Much

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The announcer's voice was shrill with drama as he exhorted spectators at the water sports show to watch as three men would dive "simultaneously at the same time!" At a tiny circus that pitched its tent in a field down the street from us, our children gladly parted with a quarter each to climb into a trailer and view what the sign touted as "The Dread Anthropoid Ape Man" (upper-case emphasis theirs), and which was, of course, a lethargic chimpanzee. In a recent article in the *New York Times Book Review*, the author decried actions that were "invidiously discriminatory." These three phrases are all tautologies; that is, they are redundant due to repetition.

Such exuberant expressions are familiar in everyday conversation and in advertising: things are unbelievably fabulous, so unique they are one of a kind, particularly special, and on and on eternally to the end of time. As can be seen, the examples convey emotion, whether positive or negative. Scientific writing, however, is by and large dispassionate and objective, and is simply not the place for tautologies, however innocent.

In the last column under this rubric I included the phrase "to finally conclude." Skip that fact that that is a split infinitive (as attentive readers, you will have identified it with appropriate scorn); as I mentioned there, it is also a tautology: a conclusion is assumed to be final. A not infrequent referral in many case reports is to a patient's "past medical history." If it is history, does that not imply

ago? What is the point of saying "past?" People are noted as repeating something again, when actually they are simply repeating it; that is, stating it once more.

The examples can be a little more subtle, to the extent, in fact, that they are not actually tautologies, but simply provide too much information. One that sticks in my mind went something like this: "The patient was taken to the operating room where he underwent subtotal gastrectomy." No kidding. Where else would the operation have been performed?

Of course, some of these phrases slip off the tongue or pen automatically, as part of the jargon. Or perhaps the idea is that the little extras will help nail the point more securely. I often wonder if they are included for no other reason than to make a paper appear longer.

Short and sweet is my motto. Certainly space is a consideration in a journal that is increasing in size as significantly as **Pharmacotherapy**. Clarity and exactness are also important, and exaggeration rarely strengthens the case of either. I submit that we can leave the overblown verbiage to Madison Avenue and whatever bodice ripper is on the best seller list, and in these pages continue to strive to say no more and no less than what we mean.

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