

"The road to hell is paved with adverbs." A good words (right order) e-book by Patrick E. McLean

Stephen King said: "The road to hell is paved with adverbs."

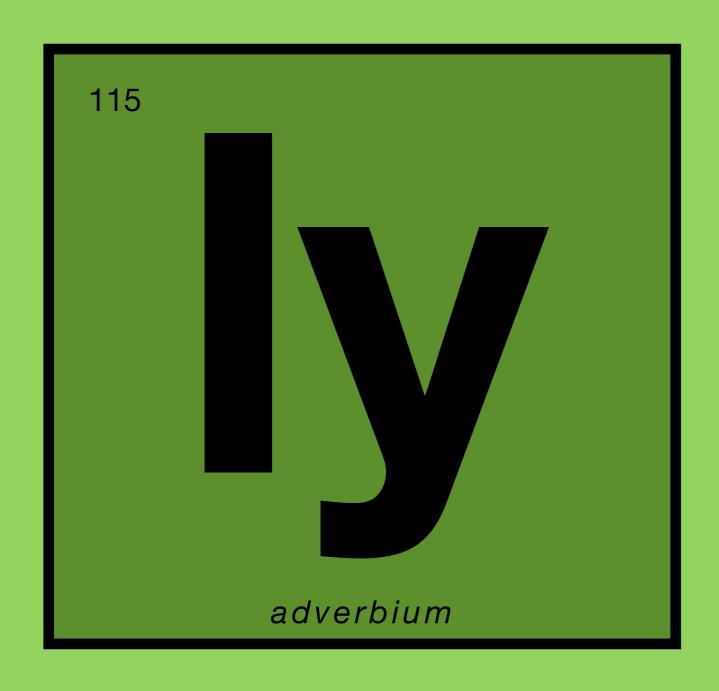
And since he's demonstrated a great deal of professional competence with both words and hellish things, I'm inclined to agree with his opinion, but...

(adverb)
What, exactly, does that mean?

(adverb)
What does that mean, exactly?



(Is there no getting rid of it?)



An adverb is any word that modifies a verb. Adverbs, especially the pavingstone-on-the-road-to-hell kind, make a habit of ending in '-ly.'



When they're good, they are incredibly useful.

ADVERBS OF PLACE

Words that explain where something happens. "He carried the ball <u>inside</u>." Adverbs of place include: here, there inside, outside, everywhere, north

ADVERBS OF QUESTION

Words that explain the nature of a question. "How is this helping?" how, why, when, where, who, what.

ADVERBS OF NUMBER

Words that explain how often something happens. They include: always, never, seldom, frequently, once, twice, often.

ADVERBS OF DEGREE

To what extent does something happen? almost, also, only, very, enough, rather, too.

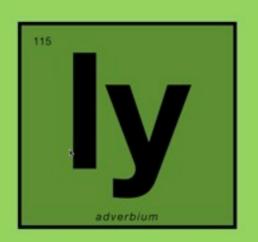
ADVERBS OF TIME

Words that explain when something happens. "We went to breakfast <u>after</u> the show." Adverbs of Time include: after, before, since, already, soon, then, now.

ADVERBS OF AFFIRMATION OR DENIAL

"Yes, this page is getting a little dull." yes, no, not, certainly, maybe, probably, perhaps.





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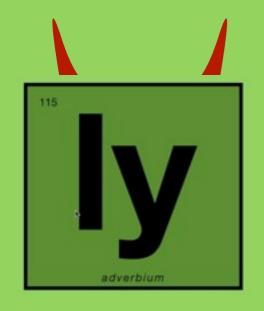
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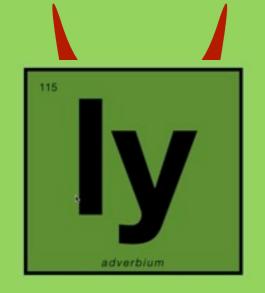


But they can quickly become the paving stones on the road to hell.

THE ALMOST UNIVERSALLY EVIL ADVERBS OF MANNER

Words that explain how something happens. "He <u>quickly</u> ran inside." Adverbs of manner are the ones that end in '-ly.' While it's almost always better to do without an adverb if you can, adverbs of manner are almost universally bad.

(the bad kind of adverb)



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(adverb)

(adverb)

```
willingly
                        maddeningly
                            sadly
                          obviously
                          ironically
                         predictably
                          laughably
"The road to hell is { clearly } paved with adverbs."
                          irritatingly
                        unexpectedly
                        left-handedly
                         moronically
                           quickly
                           sloppily
                          recklesslv
```

hell is {There is you can

between these brackets that will not weaken the sentence. In fact, it's hard to see how the addition of any word would help this sentence do its work.

There is no word you can place and place before the control of the



(long, imprecise verb)

The road to hell has been surfaced with a mixture of roofing tar and recycled adverbs.

(long, nasty adverbial clause)

The road to hell has been re-surfaced countless times with the finest mixture of roofing tar, recycled adverbs and the toenail clippings of famous grammarians who are now deceased.

The road to hell has been re-surfaced countless

There is simply no limit to the times with the finest mixture of roofing tar, number of words you can cram recycled adverbs and the toenail clippings of into a defenseless sentence.

famous grammarians who are now deceased.

(adverb) The road to hell has been re-surfaced countless There is simply no limit to the times with the finest mixture of roofing tar, number of words you can cram into a defenseless sentence.

paved with good intentions."

Ironically, people turn to adverbs and adjectives when they want to add emphasis. But they actually make it harder for them to stress their point, because the adverbs make their writing harder to comprehend.

(adverb)

(the damn things are everywhere.)

paved with good intentions."

Ironically, people turn to adverbs and adjectives when they want to add emphasis. But they actually make it harder for them to stress their point, because the adverbs make their writing harder to comprehend.

A long time ago, before air quality sensors and the the SPCA, miners used to carry canaries into the mines with them when they worked. As it happens, canaries are very sensitive to poisonous gases. So if the canary died, the passing of the unfortunate bird served as a warning that the air might be bad.

Now I'm not saying that every time you use a word ending in '-ly' that God kills a canary. (That's what I believe, but it's not polite to talk about religion.) I'm suggesting that when you come across an adverb, you could think to yourself, "Hunh, look at that. It's a dead canary. Maybe I should check the quality of the writing around here."



A big part of the difference between being a good writer and being a bad writer is the attention you pay to adverbs.

1993 Bulwer-Lytton Contest (for worst fiction) winner

The camel died quite suddenly on the second day, and Selena fretted sulkily and, buffing her already impeccable nails – not for the first time since the journey began – pondered snidely if this would dissolve into a vignette of minor inconveniences like all the other holidays spent with Basil.



There are a lot of problems with that piece of writing. After all, it's not just bad, it's award-winningly bad, but upon closer inspection...

(A somewhat humorous, hyphenated adverb)

(adverbial clause)

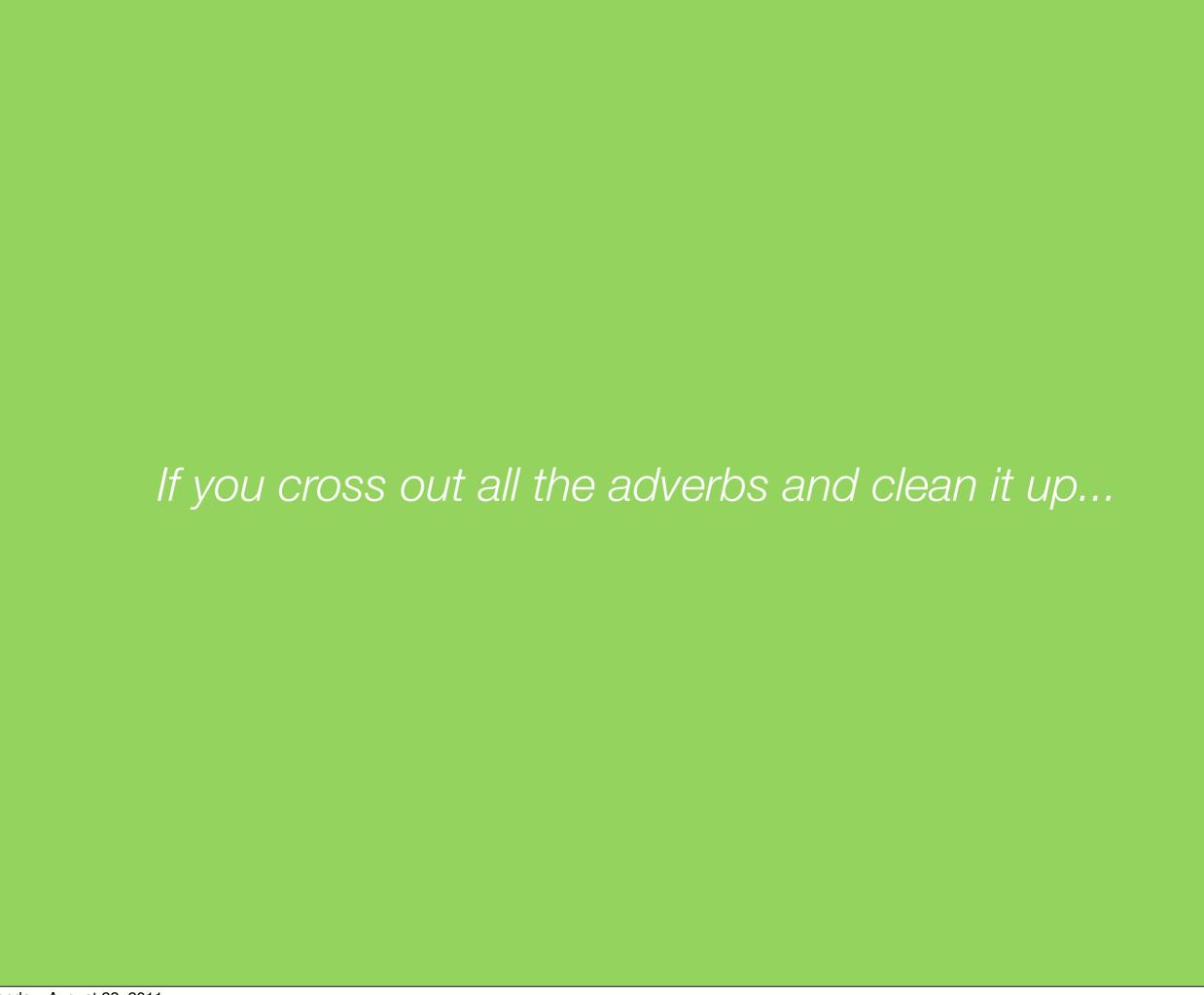
(adverb)

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(adjectival bit)

(adverb)

(prepositional phrase in an adjective's clothing)



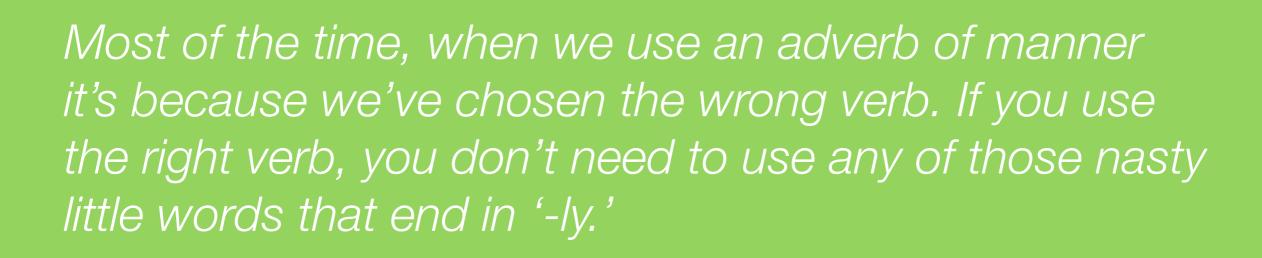


The camel died on the second day. "Delightful," thought Selena, "another holiday with Basil."

The camel died quite suddenly on the second day, and Selena fretted sulkily and, buffing her already impeccable nails – not for the first time since the journey began – pondered snidely if this would dissolve into a vignette of minor inconveniences like all the other holidays spent with Basil.

What the does that even mean?

The camel died quite suddenly on the second day, and Selena fretted sulkily and, buffing her already impeccable nails – not for the first time since the journey began – pondered snidely if this would dissolve into a vignette of minor inconveniences like all the other holidays spent with Basil.

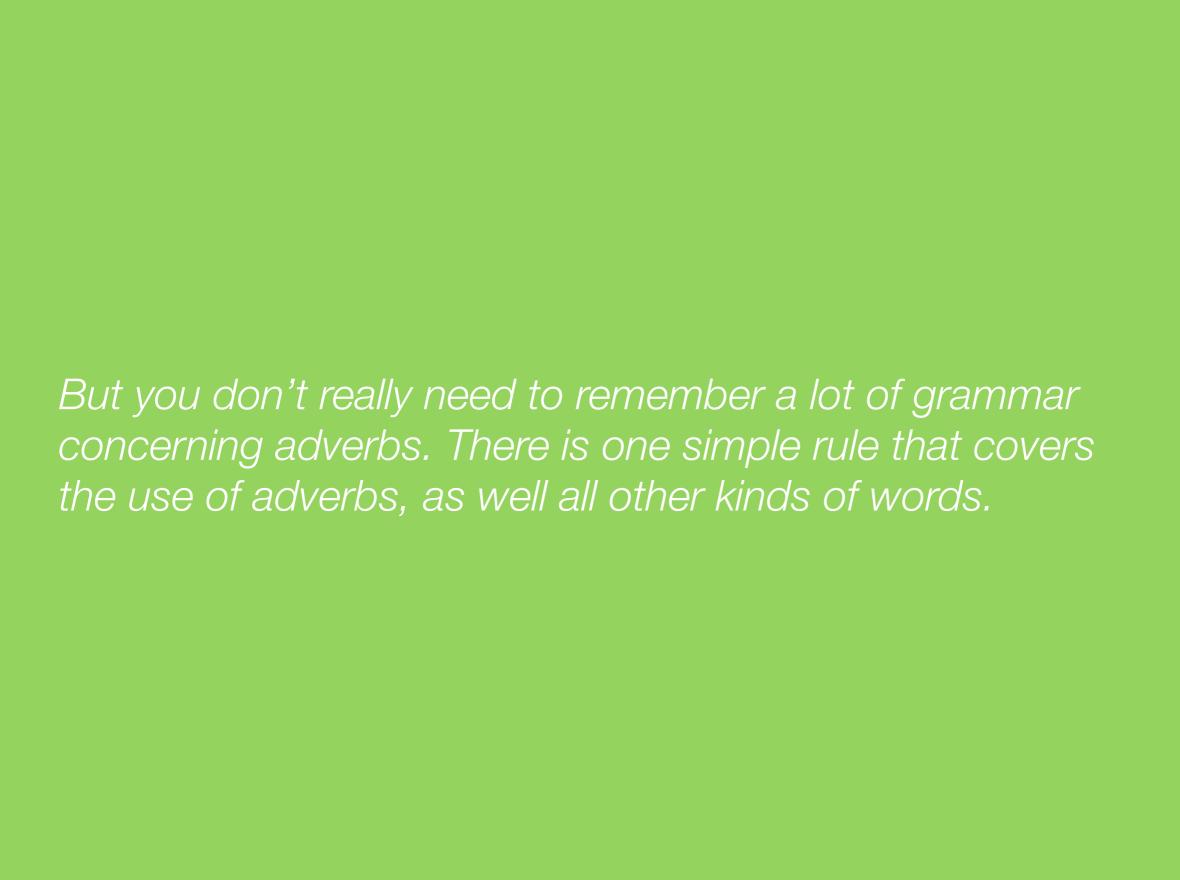


Ran Quickly – Sprinted
Ran Away – Fled
Ran Slowly – Walked
Ran Awkwardly – Stumbled

Said quietly – Whispered
Said loudly – Yelled
Said huskily – Breathed
Said dryly – Rasped

Really Liked – Loved
Really Liked – Admired
Really Liked – Adored
Really Liked – Lusted

Laughed Madly – Cackled
Played Loudly – Blared
Thought Intensely – Concentrated
Breathed Deeply – Sighed



Omit Needless Words

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

William Strunk from "The Elements of Style"



About the Author

Patrick E. McLean is writer, writing coach and consultant who blogs at goodwordsrightorder.com. You can absolutely hire him to help you or your organization with your words. He loves feedback and hates writing about himself in the third person.



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(Hopefully, after reading this book, you know why this adverb should die.)

Patrick E. McLean is writer, writing coach and confultant who blogs at goodwordsrightorder.com. You can absolutely hire him to help you or your organization with your words. He loves feedback and hates writing about himself in the third person.

(And this one.)



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(Wouldn't this be better if it was 'provided' instead of made available?)

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(Go ahead, send it to everybody you know.)

