



“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?

Exactly what does that mean?



(Is there no getting rid of it?)

115

ly

adverbium

An adverb is any word that modifies a verb. Adverbs, especially the paving-stone-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 inside." 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 after 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.

(large adverb)



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THE ALMOST UNIVERSALLY EVIL ADVERBS OF MANNER

Words that explain how something happens. “He quickly 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

recklessly

hell is { } paved with

There is no word you can place 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.

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

(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
times with the finest mixture of roofing tar,
recycled adverbs and the toenail clippings of
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s 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...*

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(A somewhat humorous,
hyphenated adverb)



(adverbial clause)

(adverb)

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(adjectival bit)

(adverb)

(prepositional phrase in an adjective's clothing)

If you cross out all the adverbs and clean it up...

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

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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.

Most of the time, when we use an adverb of manner it's because we've chosen the wrong verb. If you use the right verb, you don't need to use any of those nasty little words that end in '-ly.'

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

But you don't really need to remember a lot of grammar concerning adverbs. There is one simple rule that covers the use of adverbs, as well all other kinds of words.

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

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



(And this one.)

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



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

(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.)

(No really, it's over. Go read something else.)