

Words, Words, Words

“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter. ’tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” -Mark Twain

While there is no magic formula for choosing the right word in every situation, there are some guidelines that can help in many situations. They are the following:

Guideline #1: The Right Words Are Often Unexpected

Highlight the unexpected words below.

“These violent delights have violent ends
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which, as they kiss, consume. The sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness
And in the taste confounds the appetite.” --Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*

Guideline #2: The Right Words Often Have Inherent Interest

Highlight the three most inherently interesting words below.

“Chicago. August. A brilliant day, hot, with a brutal staring sun pouring down rays that were like molten rain. A day on which the very outlines of the buildings shuttered as if in protest at the heat. Quivering lines sprang up from the baked pavements and wriggled along the shining car-tracks. The automobiles parked at the curbs were a dancing blaze, and the glass of the shop-windows threw out a blinding radiance. Sharp particles of dust rose from burning sidewalks, stinging the seared or dripping skins of wilting pedestrians. What small breeze there was seemed like the breath of flame fanned by slow bellows.” -Nella Larsen in *Passing*

Guideline #3: The Right Words Often Have Depth

Words have different depths. For example, if I were to say “my dorm room is small”, you know it is small, but you don’t know much else. But if I say “my dorm is a prison”, the switch from “small” to “prison” suggests images of tv prison dramas, solitary confinement, lousy food, deprivation of life’s great pleasures, a poorly lit and cramped room, and a 100 other things.

Please look at the lines from Pablo Neruda’s “Every Day You Play” and choose two words that have depth. Write these words below and make a list of all the things they mean to you.

Every Day You Play

*Every day you play with the light of the universe.
Subtle visitor, you arrive in the flower and the water.
You are more than this white head that I hold tightly
as a cluster of fruit, every day, between my hands.*

*...Suddenly the wind howls and bangs at my shut window.
The sky is a net crammed with shadowy fish.
Here all the winds let go sooner or later, all of them.*

*...The storm whirls dark leaves
and turns loose all the boats that were moored last night to the sky.
You are here. Oh, you do not run away.
You will answer me to the last cry.*

*...While the sad wind goes slaughtering butterflies
I love you, and my happiness bites the plum of your mouth.
How you must have suffered getting accustomed to me,
my savage, solitary soul, my name that sends them all running.*

*...I will bring you happy flowers from the mountains, bluebells,
dark hazels, and rustic baskets of kisses.
I want to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees.*



Word #1:

Word #2: