

An Easy Editing Practice to Make Your Writing More Clear

The goal of nonfiction writing is clarity.

You have an idea in your head. You want to tell us about it. If you were doing so in person, our blank stares and puzzled eyebrows could let you know when you're confusing us. No such luxury exists in writing.

A reader will not muddle through unclear work. They won't ask "what do you mean by this?" They will simply stop reading. And that's a shame because it's likely that what you have to say is *worth* saying. Otherwise, why would you bother writing it down?

This is why editing is so important.

Editing is not about combing through commas and searching for split infinitives. **It is about making the unclear more clear.** A common word that gets in the way of this goal is this one:

Something.

Something is a crutch of first drafts. Even when you don't expect it, *something* will creep in and fill the gaps your poor, coffee-craving brain can't quite fill. You don't have a better noun. So go you with *something*.

"They'll get it," you think.

They won't.

Let's do an example. Here's an excerpt from my friend [Minnow Park's blog](#).

"You go from amateur to a professional when you start making **something** for other people.

Professional isn't merely getting paid. In 2021, getting paid to do **something** is easier than ever. If earning money is the only metric you are judging your work by, you're starting off on the wrong, scarce foot."

Nice. You get the vibe, right? It makes sense.

Is it as clear as possible, though?

I think not.

The question is — what do we replace that *something* with? For the first sentence, I think about the audience. Who is Minnow writing for? I think it's creative people. A possible replacement might be this:

"You go from amateur to professional when you start making **art** for other people."

Maybe Minnow isn't targeting creative people, though. Maybe he's going as broadly as possible, and that's why he chose *something* in the first place. The word could still be swapped:

“You go from amateur to professional when you start making **work** for other people.”

This keeps the meaning, but it’s more clear. What if he was targeting a different group entirely?

“You go from amateur to professional when you start making **sales** for other people.”

Do you see how a single word can change the entire trajectory of your point? Words matter more than you think, especially when they are written down. However, it might be that you don’t need to replace a word at all but remove one. That’s the case with Minnow’s second *something*.

In 2021, getting paid to do **something** is easier than ever.

Again, we get it. But is it possible to make that sentence even better? What if we simply cut out a few words?

In 2021, getting paid is easier than ever.

Did we keep the original meaning? Yes. Did we make the sentence clearer? Yes. As a bonus, we shortened the sentence by three whole words. This vaults the reader easily into the next sentence.

Do me a favor. The next time you’re about to release a blog post, press “CTRL+F” and search for “*something*.”

Then, simply swap or delete it.

And enjoy your new level of clarity.

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