



Lesson 1.4

Freedom from Filler

Ask anyone who's had that second (or third) piece of chocolate cake. Too much of a good thing can be as bad as too little. This applies to writing, as well. Shocking as it may sound, some writers overcrowd their writing with unneeded information just to make the writing longer. Their thinking is that longer is better. It *is*, right?

Uh—wrong! In writing, more isn't better; only *better* is better. Details that are irrelevant or repeated are known as *filler* because they're only included to fill the page, not to entertain or enlighten anyone. Writers resort to filler when they're tired—or when they don't know the topic well enough to add anything new. Big mistake. Only add what's worth reading. Do your research, and keep your writing filler-free.



Sharing an Example: *Artemis Fowl*

Here's a short passage focusing on the title character from Eoin Colfer's futuristic fantasy tale, *Artemis Fowl*. Read it aloud carefully. Listen for information about Artemis and the world he lives in. What does this author want you to know? Read the passage a second time, pencil in hand. Underline details about Artemis and his world.



After eighteen solid hours of sleep and a light continental breakfast, Artemis climbed to the study that he had inherited from his father. It was a traditional enough room—dark oak and floor-to-ceiling shelving—but Artemis had jammed it with the latest computer technology. A series of networked Apple Macs whirred from various corners of the room. One was running CNN’s Web site through a DAT projector, throwing oversized current-affairs images against the back wall.

Butler was there already, firing up the hard drives.

“Shut them all down, except the Book. I need quiet for this.”

The manservant started. The CNN site had been running for almost a year. Artemis was convinced that news of his father’s rescue would come from there. Shutting it down meant that he was finally letting go.

“All of them?”

Artemis glanced at the back wall for a moment. “Yes,” he said finally. “All of them.”

Butler took the liberty of patting his employer gently on the shoulder, just once, before returning to work. Artemis cracked his knuckles. Time to do what he did best—plot dastardly acts.

Artemis Fowl
by Eoin Colfer



What Did You Learn?

In this passage, the author is beginning to create a picture of Artemis and his world. In the box below, write at least five things you learned about Artemis or the world in which he lives. Include vital information and essential details only. If you think the author included any filler—distracting, unnecessary, or repetitive details—write that information outside the box.

Artemis and His World

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Share and Compare

Meet with a partner to share what you learned about Artemis and his world. Did you include similar details? Did either of you find any filler? If so, be prepared to explain why you think it's filler.

Fill 'em Up

Sometimes writing badly on purpose makes you SO aware of a problem that you avoid it in your own writing. Ready to give it a try?

Meet with your writing circle to review the first paragraph of the passage from *Artemis Fowl* (printed below). We provided extra space between lines to give you room for adding filler. We also provided a couple examples using carets (^) to show where we inserted filler. Work as a group to come up with as much filler as you can *without* changing the basic meaning.

Note: You do not need to use our examples—change or eliminate them if you want. Have fun, but stay focused on the task: adding filler without changing basic meaning.

Waking slowly

^ after eighteen solid hours of sleep and a light
 clothed in his Spiderman pajamas
 continental breakfast, Artemis ^ climbed to the study
 elderly, slightly balding
 that he had inherited from his ^ father. It was a
 traditional enough room—dark oak and floor-to-ceiling
 shelving—but Artemis had jammed it with the latest
 computer technology. A series of networked AppleMacs



whirred from various corners of the room. One was running CNN's Web site through a DAT projector, throwing oversized current-affairs images against the back wall.

Filler-Free Writing

Don't you feel better after getting that filler out of your system? Now the big question is how to keep it out—and away from your own writing.

To conclude this lesson, you'll write a descriptive paragraph, focusing on a place you know well or can imagine vividly. Here are some suggestions, but any place you can picture well will do:

- Your room
- A friend's or relative's home
- Anywhere with an amazing view
- The inside of your locker (or a friend's locker)
- A secret hiding place
- The bottom of the ocean
- Somewhere in outer space

Close your eyes for a moment and picture the place. Take it in: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings. Think what is most important—what your readers need to know to feel as if they're right there with you. Then—write. Write. *Write*. Don't stop until time is up. Use your own paper and skip every other line.



Share and Compare

Read your draft over quickly and insert any last-minute details that occur to you. Then share your descriptive paragraphs with partners or in writing circles. Did you

- include critical details?
- answer readers' questions?
- avoid filler?

Work with your partner to do one last revision. Insert important details you missed. Cross out any filler. Read it aloud one last time to make sure you're satisfied with your revision.



A Writer's Questions

How do you know which details to cut and which ones to keep in a piece of writing? What sort of rules or personal system do you use? What happens when you cut too much?



Putting It to the Test

If you make your writing too short, won't you lose points in a writing assessment? If so, what should you do if you simply run out of things to say—repeat yourself (skillfully, of course) or just leave your piece short and hope for the best?