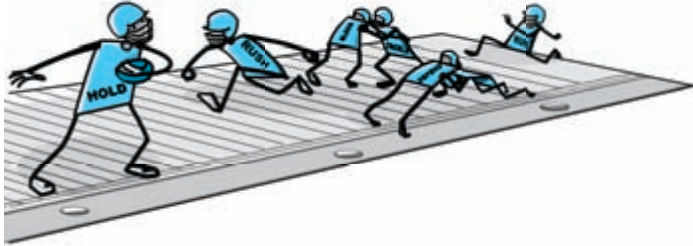


## Lesson 4.4

# Stop the Clutter!

**Y**ou're having a dream . . . All the words in your writer's vocabulary are lined up like a team on the sidelines, anxiously awaiting the signal



to be called into play. Suddenly it's time to write, they're at the ready, and they *all* want to get in the game. You try to blow your whistle . . . but nothing comes out! Here they come, ready or not, all the words you know, descending on the blank page, wave upon wave of language cluttering your writing, smothering ideas, overwhelming your readers . . . and then you wake up. The page is still blank. Your red pen is right there on the table where you left it! It's not too late. You can still . . . *stop the clutter!*

## Sharing a First Draft

An eighth grade student was asked to write about a sports experience. Here's his first draft. Read it carefully aloud, discuss it with a partner, and mark your response:

Summer football camp started yesterday. It's fun. You learn a whole lot of skills that are very useful in playing the game.

I like most things about it. It lasts from now until August.

- ☐ It's too short and too vague. I didn't learn much.
- ☐ It's just right—a good balance of detail and concise writing.
- ☐ It's full of clutter! I could cut this in half and it would be way better.

## Sharing a Revised Draft

This student was told to add more detail to his writing. He made an effort to do just that, and the following revised draft is the result. Share it aloud in your writing circle and discuss your response.

Summer football conditioning camp began yesterday, and it will last through the first full week of August. Football conditioning camp is organized and run by the local youth football association and the varsity head football coach of our local neighborhood high school. Camp goes from late afternoon until early evening or until it gets dark, which is about 8. The camp is for anybody, but you have to be going into grade three, four, five, six, seven, or eight. I am going into grade eight, and this is my fourth year of camp. You don't have to have any previous football experience, but it probably helps if you have had some experience with throwing, catching, blocking, and tackling. If you haven't had much experience, the camp's purpose is to teach about the basics of football—throwing, catching, blocking, tackling, and running. One fun thing about football conditioning camp is that it is one chance to hang out with lots of people you know, like your friends and people from your school or neighborhood. From the time school gets out until the first full week in August, I don't think about anything except football and going to my favorite thing, football conditioning camp.

## Our Response

How would you rate this revised piece?

- ☐ It's still sketchy. I need a LOT more information.
- ☐ It's very balanced—plenty of detail but still concise.
- ☐ This writer went overboard! Where's my red pen????!!

If you said the writer went overboard, we agree. Detail—as you know—is good, but this writer got carried away. How many words do you think this revision has?

A third draft is needed—and that's where you come in. Read the passage again, pen or pencil in hand. Look *and* listen for clutter, crossing out words, phrases, or sentences that are clouding or crowding the message. You may need to reword some parts to smooth the flow. Work independently.

## Share and Compare

Compare your revision with a partner's. Who cut more? Were either of you downright ruthless? Not to worry—sometimes that's a good thing. (Don't be afraid to be equally ruthless with your own writing!)

## One More Comparison

Now your teacher will share our revision—just as an example. Our final revision is 103 words long. As you compare your version to ours, put a check by the comparison that is closest to the truth.

- ☐ I slashed even more—mine is down to a few sentences.
- ☐ I cut about the same amount.
- ☐ I found less to cut, but I still like my revision.
- ☐ I found less to cut but decided I would cut more next time.

## Putting It All Together

At the beginning of this unit you created a rough draft on a topic of your choice. Right now you may choose to work on that—or any other rough draft from your writing folder. Take a moment to find the draft you wish to work on.

Before you begin to revise, reflect for a moment on what it takes to make word choice strong. Each of these could be part of your revision. See if you can list four strategies for improving word choice:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

You'll use these skills—and any others you think of as you write—to improve the word choice in your rough draft. Feel free to add, delete, or change anything. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to help you.

You have about 15 minutes for this revision. If you finish early, you should

- read your writing one more time to be sure you like the sound of it.
- make any last-minute changes that make it ready to share in a writing circle.
- offer coaching to anyone who needs help.

## Share and Compare

Share your revised piece in your writing circle. Before you actually share your writing aloud, share your revision process: What did you do—and how did you know to do it? If you feel your piece needs further revision, ask for help from your circle.



### A Writer's Question

Remember the second draft of the football camp paper? In that draft, the writer added a LOT of detail—to the point of filling his writing with clutter. But is there an advantage to writing a draft like that? Explain your answer.



### Putting It to the Test

In an on-demand situation, what are some quick and easy things a writer can do to revise for word choice?