

What Mark Twain Did Not Say
but Might Have Said
If He Had Written This Book

Look here. I said fluff, flowers, and verbosity, not very fluffy, fine flowers or vibrant verbosity, if you see what I mean. I said fluff, not fine fluff. Not very fine fluff or even fiddly, flippity fluff. You did not hear me say frosty fluff or fancy fluff. In my entire life, I've never said rough fluff, tough fluff, or gruff fluff. I am prodigiously opposed to enough fluff and mightily afraid of rebuffed fluff. Just give me a noun. Fluff, that's the point.

If you see an adjective, kill it. You don't have to cause it any pain, don't smack it or hurt its feelings, don't make it cry out or whimper, just steer it elsewhere, to someone else's sick-dog sentence, where it will do your writing no harm. Avoid verbosity, which means avoiding very vivid verbosity. Eschew varicose verbosity and voluble verbosity. Stand your ground against the horrible hordes of vacuous verbosity. Those will make the bravest person swerve and likely topple over.

There are perplexed pudd'nheads who'll tell you to load your words with adjectives until the middle sags and the spokes break, but don't do it, anymore'n you'd ask a ballerina to dance with turtles in her hands. And I told you already, if you have to use some adjectives, don't put them close together. Put one adjective in Omaha and the next one in Saginaw. Make sure there's a river between 'em. And a mountain. Put *grandiose* in California and *muddled* in Ohio, where no one will notice.

When you see an adjective, squint and peek and check it in every corner to see if it can earn its keep. Tell your clear-head voice to ask you why you need to use an adjective anyway. If you used the right noun, then why are you using an adjective? Say what you propose to say with the noun in the first place. Use the right noun, not its second cousin with an adjective to prop it up. Put the right word in the right place, and the right word is not an agile, adamant, admonitory, or aquiline adjective.