

Grammar

It is time to recognize that we have a habit of speaking—unnecessarily—in two-word phrases. A thing is not merely big, it is big, *huge*. We don't just rise to the occasion, we rise *up* to it. (There is no other way to rise but up, so why bother saying "up"?) Nor is it necessary to shut *down* a factory when we can merely shut it.

To avoid being killed *off*, we seek a *safe* haven. A haven is a safe place; no need to say the same thing twice as we do when describing *close* proximity.

And (in a National Post headline!) what, pray tell, is an *undercover* mole? Is that type somehow different from the overt mole, the spy who tells everyone that she is, indeed, a spy?

Is 3:00 A.M. *in the morning* any different from 3:00 A.M.?

When doing my laundry yesterday, I didn't have to separate *out* the whites from the colors, I simply separated them. It worked just fine, and nothing got confused by my terseness.

Unique means one-of-a-kind. What is the meaning of *very* unique? Unique is as far as something can go in being special, much as we might want to emphasize its individuality.

Count on wordy bureaucrats in government to create tautologies as in: Whenever a woman claims that she did not give *affirmative* consent either verbally or with unequivocal nonverbal cues.... Consent means agreement, as does affirmative.

Prior warning is a mind-boggling concept, like *pre*-registration. A warning is—again, by definition—prior, before the calamity. You can warn someone, but you cannot *pre*-warn someone.

Pre-registration is the act of registering before registration. But if I am *pre*-registering, isn't that registration? As I said, mind-boggling. At the airport, what is *pre*-boarding? Does that mean to get on before you get on?

I could continue *on*, but I've already added *in* enough comments to put you on guard about those insidious second words attaching themselves to your otherwise spare prose. I hope you will seek *out* in your everyday usage those *pretty* senseless examples and alter them in the name of brevity.

Very sincerely (*I really, really, really mean it!*),

Ted Scott