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## How to Firm Up Flabby Prose

By **Beth Mende Conny**

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Want to be a lean, mean, writing machine? Then put your words on a diet. Here are some great suggestions for cutting flab, firming muscle and punching up your prose.

Learn to strip  
Brilliant as your prose may be, you likely can toss a word or two ... or three or twenty. Be brutal. Strip away the extraneous until your sentences go buck naked. They can then, like streakers, zip across your page.

Remember the if's  
If you can say it in one page instead of three--do so.

## How to Firm Up Flabby Prose

If you can say it in one paragraph instead of three—do so.

If you can say it in one sentence instead of three—do so.

If you can say it in one word instead of three—do so.

If you can say it in a one-syllable word instead of one with three—do so.

Avoid repetitions, redundancies, reiterations, restatements

...

\* owns his own business = business owner

\* a great number of times = many times

\* red-colored train = red train

\* broke both his legs = broke his legs

\* during the winter months = during winter

\* in the not-too-distant future = in the future

\* at this point in time = presently/now

\* postponed until later = postponed

\* mutual cooperation = cooperation

### Take action

In writing, as in life, you can't sit there like a blob.

You've got to use the active voice. Before and after examples:

\* The ballots were counted by him. = He counted the ballots.

\* He was robbed by a knife-wielding teenager. = A knife-wielding teenager robbed him.

\* There is much that today's parents have to worry about.  
= Today's parents have much to worry about.

\* It has been shown by numerous studies that insulating your water heater saves energy. = Studies show you save energy by insulating your water heater.

### Don't be dramatic

When possible, use the plainest words possible. For example, too often we use "exclaim", "declare" or "chime" when plain ole "said" would do. Said's a great word; it doesn't draw attention to itself. Readers skip over it and concentrate instead on what's being said. Other examples:

\* meander/shuffle/saunter = walk

\* odorous/malodorous/redolent = smelly

\* mawkish/maudlin/bathetic = sentimental

BTW—Sometimes people don't just walk; they really do meander, shuffle and saunter. Allow them their style, but keep your words in check.

### Mix it up

Good writing has flow. One sentence rolls into the other, creating an ebb and flow of words. Stop the flow and you get writing like this:

\* I love chocolate. Chocolate is tasty. Chocolate cookies are my favorite. I like chocolate ice cream, too. I like chocolate milk.

An alternative:

Chocolate cookies, ice cream, milk—I love anything chocolate.

Don't worry about punctuation and grammar  
Big deal if you don't know the difference between who and whom, or when (or when not) to use a colon. Most of us don't, which is why books on punctuation and grammar abound. Use them as you need them.

Hot tip: Find three books written in a style even you understand. When you get stuck, say, on split infinitives, glance through all three for guidance. You'll find that three angles are better than one and almost always provide the guidance you need.

BTW—According to one of my grammar books, split infinitives are acceptable when writing informally. My other two books say no, no, no. Here, I defer to the minority.

Beth Mende Conny is the founder and president of [WriteDirections.com](http://WriteDirections.com). She has published more than four dozen books and collections, and helps individuals and businesses bring their projects to publication. She can be contacted at [Beth@WriteDirections.com](mailto:Beth@WriteDirections.com).

## **Poetry in a Nutshell**

**By Gary R. Hess**

Poetry is more than just rhyming and prose that is in meters and verse. It is an art form. It is something that can not be judged by its cover and can not be criticized to the point where it just "sucks." Poetry is

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about expression. Poetry expresses the way we feel on a certain subject through imagery and other senses. It helps us deal with our daily problems, be it good or bad.

The emotion which is put within the poem brings it life. A poem without emotion is not a poem at all but simply prose. Poetry is what makes us feel happy or sad, mad or gleeful, loving or broken hearted. Poetry is life on paper. It does not need to be of a certain subject or even rhyme.

Poetry is poetry. It has its own mind. If it flows good if not... it needs work. The rules can be bent but not broken. Our life is our life and no one can tell us what we have been through but ourselves. We know best not some stranger reading our poems. Our poetry is our life, not what someone says.

Rhyming in poetry is not always the best way to express yourself. Rhyming actually takes away many words that could have been used. If you try to rhyme it cuts your dictionary into little pieces. It doesn't need to be this way, choose flow over rhyme.

As a result of this, poetry is defined as a way of putting flowing words together in meter and verse to show emotion or tell a story.

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