## Content - Vague Vocabulary

The Content - Vague Vocabulary analysis identifies the percentage of vague words in a document; and when the score is excessive, it lists the vague words to enable the writer to delete, replace, or supplement them.
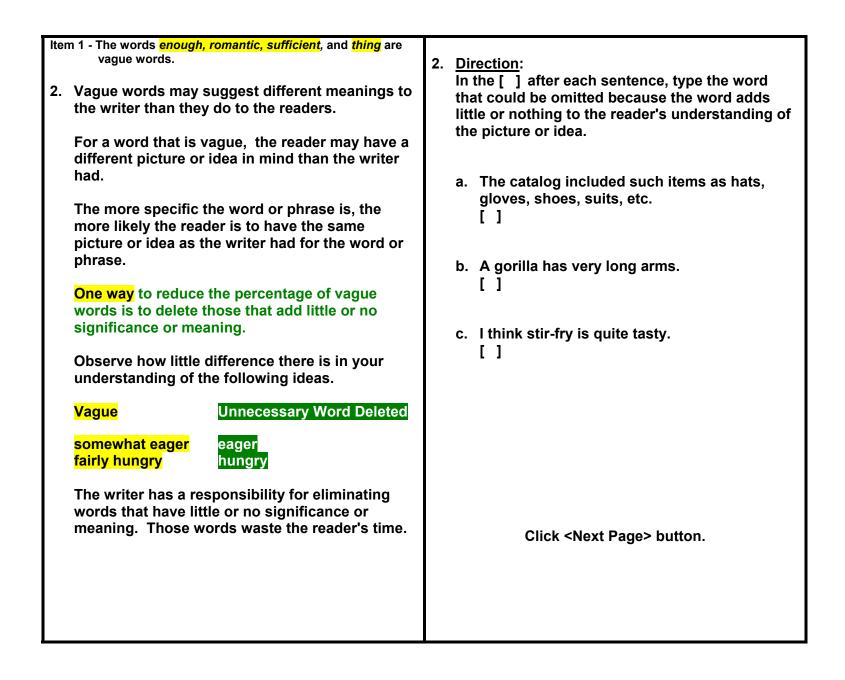
## Writer's WorkBench

| READ | RESPOND |
|---|---|
| 1. Read the information in the box in the **READ** column. | 2. Then, respond as directed in the **RESPOND** column. |

1. The following words are examples of vague words.

| a lot | (how much or how many?) |
|---|---|
| bad | (naughty, criminal, spoiled?) |
| make | (bring about, mix, force?) |

1. **Direction**
   Type an X in the [   ] before the vague words.

[   ] noon

[   ] enough

[   ] kiss

[   ] romantic

[   ] sufficient

[   ] ten

[   ] thing

[   ] keyboard

**Click <Next Page> button.**

**Item 1 -** The words ==*enough, romantic, sufficient*==, and ==*thing*== are vague words.

2. **Vague words may suggest different meanings to the writer than they do to the readers.**

   **For a word that is vague, the reader may have a different picture or idea in mind than the writer had.**

   **The more specific the word or phrase is, the more likely the reader is to have the same picture or idea as the writer had for the word or phrase.**

   ==**One way**== **to reduce the percentage of vague words is to delete those that add little or no significance or meaning.**

   **Observe how little difference there is in your understanding of the following ideas.**

   | ==**Vague**== | **Unnecessary Word Deleted** |
   |---|---|
   | ==**somewhat eager**== | **eager** |
   | ==**fairly hungry**== | **hungry** |

   **The writer has a responsibility for eliminating words that have little or no significance or meaning. Those words waste the reader's time.**

2. **Direction:**
   **In the [   ] after each sentence, type the word that could be omitted because the word adds little or nothing to the reader's understanding of the picture or idea.**

   a. **The catalog included such items as hats, gloves, shoes, suits, etc.**
      **[   ]**

   b. **A gorilla has very long arms.**
      **[   ]**

   c. **I think stir-fry is quite tasty.**
      **[   ]**

   **Click <Next Page> button.**

You should have identified the following as words that could be omitted in Item 2: *etc., very,* and *quite.*

3. <mark>Another way</mark> to reduce the percentage of vague words is to replace them with more specific words.

Observe the differences in the pictures or ideas that you have in mind for the following expressions.

| Vague | More specific |
|-------|---------------|
| sometime | noon |
| affection | kiss |
| few | five |

The writer has a responsibility for using words that will help the reader understand exactly what the writer had in his or her mind.

3. <u>Direction</u>
In the [ ], type a word or words that are more specific and that could replace the underlined vague word(s) in each sentence.

a. I would give <u>the world</u> to go to the concert.
[   ]

b. <u>People</u> in my classes do not write letters.
[   ]

c. We had a <u>good</u> time on our vacation.
[   ]

Click <Next Page> button.

Possible responses to Item 3.
What would you give to go to the concert?
       one hundred dollars?
       a month's pay of $3,000?
       your antique Buick?
People in classes are called students.
Did you have an exciting time, a frightening time,
       a nerve-wracking time. . .?

**4.** **One more way to reduce the percentage of vague words is to raise the number of specific words, phrases, and examples. In doing so, you will lower the percentage of vague words.**

**Vague**

**When we went to Valleyfair, I experienced many wonderful emotions. I had an exciting day.**

**Revision**

**When we went to Valleyfair in Shakopee, Minnesota, I experienced many wonderful emotions. First, I felt delight as I glided blissfully down the water slide. Then, as my friend Tom and I rode the Ferris wheel, I reveled in the view of the Minneapolis skyline. While those feelings gave me great pleasure, the terror that I knew as I hurtled helplessly down the roller coaster stays with me still. Truly, I had an exciting day.**

**4.** **Directions**
**Read each item. Then, revise it by adding specifics in the Revision [ ].**

**Item A:** **Throughout history, from year to year, many identified wonderful star formations.**

**Revision: Throughout history, from the year [ ] to the year [ ], many [ ] identified wonderful and [ ] formations.**

**Item B:** **As my expression shows, I am happy. However, my emotions keep changing from depression to fear to elation.**

**Revision: As the expression in my [ ] and [ ] show, I am happy as a [ ]. However, my emotions keep changing from depression when my life spins [ ] to fear when my life runs [ ] to elation when my life ascends to [ ].**

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**Possible additions in Item 4**

A. **Revision:** Throughout history, from the year [4000 BC] to the year [1800 AD], many [astronomers] identified wonderful and [animal-like] formations.

B. **Revision:** As the expression in my [eyes] and [voice] show, I am happy as a [bear with a jar of honey]. However, my emotions keep changing from depression when my life spins [downhill] to fear when my life runs [out of control] to elation when my life ascends to [the mountaintop].

Which ever way you choose (delete, change, or add),
keep vague words in mind
so that you can avoid them as you write.

**THE END**

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