

You will probably agree that *immense*, *newspaper office*, *Instinctively*, *blank*, *search*, and *mechanically* need no improvement. These are clear, exact words. But *some time later* is vague and should be replaced by an expression like *in a few minutes*. And *were in suspense* should definitely be changed to *waited in suspense*.

Two verbs deserve special attention: *get* and *make*. These verbs are vague because we use them so often to express so many different ideas. When we *get* sick, we *make* an appointment with the doctor. We *get* to his office, the doctor *makes* his diagnosis, and then we *get* a prescription at the drugstore. We usually *get* better if we *make* sure we follow the doctor's instructions. (You should have *gotten* the point by now.)

Did you notice all the forms of *get* and *make* in the paragraph about telegraph operators? There are seven of them! *Made* aware, *got* a messenger boy, *make* out which one, *gotten* the news, *gotten* a word, *got* hold of a paper, *gotten* the news. No, Thomas Edison did not write that way. Here are the verbs he actually used: *called* the attention, *sent* a messenger boy, *see* which one, *received* the news, *taken* a word, *held* up a paper, *handled* the news. The writer did not use *get* or *make* even one time!

Of course, the verbs *get* and *make* should not be banished from your vocabulary, for they have many worthwhile uses in everyday speech. But in writing, you should try to replace these two with verbs that communicate exactly what you mean. The following sets give several more examples.

Vague verbs:

- I got five dollars for mowing that lawn.
- Two of my rabbits have gotten away.
- We made it to the airport in time.
- Our team made ten points.

Exact verbs:

- I earned five dollars for mowing that lawn.
- Two of my rabbits have escaped.
- We arrived at the airport in time.
- Our team scored ten points.

Examine your writing with a critical eye. Whenever you spot a vague or an inexact word, replace it with a more specific word. The result will be a writing style that expresses your thoughts clearly and forcefully.

Applying the Lesson

Write a composition of 150–200 words, telling about a frightening or an exciting event. Deliberately aim for originality and exactness in your writing.

Review Exercises

Write the letters of the sentences with the better writing style. [3]

1. a. He needs to learn how to speak more kindly.
b. He needs to study the language of gentleness.
2. a. If only he would quit parading his virtues!
b. If only he would quit telling everyone how good he is!

Lesson 19 Answers

Applying the Lesson

(Individual work.)

Review Exercises

1. b
2. a