STYLE: MAKING DECISION ABOUT WORDS
Editing Course
FINDING THE PRECISE WORD

- This latest episode of kidnapping and terror has...illustrated once again our [permanent disadvantage]___(x) in dealing with people who do these things and our penchant for [deepening the disadvantage]___(y) by the way we respond. (Greenfield, in Neman, 1989)

- Substitute *disadvantage* with (1) hindrance; (2) obstruction; (3)...

- Substitute the phrases: (1) (x)‘steadfast impediment’, (y)’enhancing handicap’; (2) (x) ‘undeviating obstacle’, (y) ‘exacerbating the encumbrance’; (3)....
**Try this out:**

- Children are a relatively modern [invention]. (Alexander, in Neman, 1989)
- ...Many of these students maintain a kind of [conspiracy of silence] with men. They [secrete] away some levels of feelings and hopes until it is “too late”. (Goodman, in Neman, 1989).
Choosing words for exact expression (Denotation)

- Choose the most specific term:
  - Joey took a picture of an animal at the zoo.
  - Joey took a picture of a bear at the zoo.
  - Joey took a picture of the zoo’s polar bear cub, Whitey.

- Prefer strong verbs and vivid nouns; be sparing with modifiers.
  - Strong: verbs express actions (secrete, charge, challenge, etc.).
  - Weak: linking verbs, must be completed with adjectives or nouns (is, seem, appear, etc.)
Choosing Words for Appropriate Implication (Connotation)

- Formality and informality/Colloquialism
- The Middle Style
- The Learned Style
- Hasten, hurry, snap
- Arduous, difficult, tough
- Peruse, contemplate, study, learn, grind, bone up
CONNOTATION (CONT.)

- Connotation of Value and intensity: positive or negative response?
  - Sagacious, astute, discerning, knowing, shrewd, canny, cunning, sly, slick

- Slant: evaluative outlook of the writer.
  - I am “cautious”; you are “timid; he is “cowardly”
  - Terrorist, fundamentalist, moderate, liberal
PRECISION THROUGH IMAGERY: FOR ABSTRACT THINGS

- Objective correlative: something familiar/can be understood by the senses of the (intended) readers.
- Figurative language: metaphor, simile, symbol, etc.
AVOIDING IMPRECISION

- Resisting the desire to be impressive
- Avoid lazy thinking
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