Adjectives from A to Z

It isn’t enough to pack your prose with just any old descriptors. The selection should be both precise and meaningful. Here’s a selection of adjectives that accomplish just that.

By Laura Hale Brockway

“Which word provides a better description of a puppy: ‘brown’ or ‘cute’?” — writing guru Ann Wylie

I once wrote an article about “dangerously ambiguous” adjectives and how the use of indirect and unclear descriptors can cause readers to ignore or misinterpret your message. The lesson here is to practice precision when you select your descriptors.

What follows is a list of some precise, meaningful adjectives. Consider using these for your next writing assignment.

• abrasive
• abrupt
• abundant
• adamant
• auburn
• bawdy
• bewildered
• bitter
• boorish
• cerulean
• coarse
• colossal
• combative
• crimson
• crooked
• dashing
• deafening
• determined
• diligent
• draconian
• elegant
• enchanting
• empty
• flaky
• flawless
• frantic
• frosty
• gutsy
• guarded
• habitual
• hapless
• harmonious
• hollow
• hulking
• hypnotic
• ill-informed
• immense
• incandescent
• inflammatory
• inquisitive
• insolent
• judicious
• jumpy
• kindhearted
• languid
• lavish
• lilac
• ludicrous
• lyrical
• maddening
• makeshift
• mammoth
• measly
• melodic
• miscreant
• muddled
• murky
• narrow
• neighborly
• nimble
• noiseless
• noxious
• obedient
• onerous
• overconfident
• overwrought
• parched
• petite
• placid
• poised
• prickly
• puny
• purring
• quarrelsome
• quirky
• rabid
• raspy
• receptive
• repulsive
• resolute
• rigid
• rustic
• scarce
• scrawny
• shallow
• shaky
• somber
• sordid
• sparse
• spiteful
• subdued
• succinct
• superficial
• swift
• tart
• tasteless
• tenacious
• thundering
• tiresome
• unbecoming
• unkempt
• unrefined
• unsightly
• unsuitable
• unwieldy
• vigorous
• volatile
• wasteful
• whimsical
• wide-eyed
• wiggly
• wry
• yielding
• youthful
• zealous
• zippy

Perhaps you don’t recognize some of these words; all the better. Grab a dictionary and make a new friend.

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