

# My Life with Verbosity

John Copponex

AUGUST 13, 2015

**H**ave you ever felt completely out of control? Like you're clinging to the hood scoops of a 302 Mach 1 barreling down a highway to hell?

Hi, my name is John, and I have logorrhea.

"Hi, John."

Hey.

First of all: gross. No. Logorrhea, also known as garrulousness, wordiness or, more accurately, verbosity, has afflicted writers since time immemorial, from Dickens to Melville to Tolkien. Characterized by an excess of words, verbosity is looked down upon by most writers, but most writers don't understand.

*It's a disease, man.*

Second: yes, the Mustang from the first paragraph represents my affliction, which took hold of my life and drove it out of control. It came to a head last month with the first draft of a blog post about beer, wherein I used two completely synonymous descriptors right next to each other.

Thankfully, after my adjectival bender, fellow Nebo copywriter Drew Grossman was there to pick me up off the bathroom floor, hand me a glass of water and call me on my bullshit. The sentence read:

---

**He asked me where they came from, and I directed him to the ~~forlorn~~ top shelf of a neglected cooler.**

*God I'm the worst.*

Though I had been thinking about the problem for a while, it was this most recent incident that inspired me to tell my story as something of a cautionary tale—a foreboding prognostication to any would-be purveyors of profuse language.

...this isn't going to be pretty.

## I. ACCEPTANCE

**N**ot all verbosity is the same. There's a minor form of which almost everyone is guilty called prolixity. It's the use of unnecessarily padded idiomatic phrases. Like the proverbial pot and kettle, I'm blind to the transgressions of my own verbosity, yet I cut into the prolix writing of others as a surgeon—one who's also really unpleasant to be around.

*In order to leverage our position*

"To leverage our position" is all you need, dumb-dumb.

*Despite the fact that conversions are up*

Easy there, Faulkner. "Though conversions are up" will do just fine.

However, mine is of a decidedly more annoying form. You could call it grandiloquence: a propensity toward lofty, some might say "bombastic" language. Suffice it to say I tend to adorn my sentences with an amount of filigree. Pomposity is my verbosity.

It doesn't matter what I'm writing, whether it's a blog post, an email or a client deliverable (project managers love grandiloquent deliverables). I put my fingers on the keys, and this is the crap that comes out:

---

**While it's possible this focus on sales is generating some conversions, it's doing nothing to ingratiate the brand with its customers or engender trust.**

*Can you believe this fucking guy?*

My problem isn't with ten-dollar words per se. I don't get angry when an author sends me to a dictionary, and I don't understand people who hate learning new words. My problem lies in the inartful way these words obscure the overall picture in my writing, like when some idiot builds a huge piece of folly architecture where you were just trying to enjoy the natural scenery. Ten-dollar words should feel lived in. They should have been there since before the sentence was formed.

To better understand my problem, I wanted to find its antecedent. I began to consider my entire body of work, starting from when my little ding-dong brain was first able to put crayon to construction paper and make words. I found that, like many addiction stories, mine has roots that reach far back into childhood.

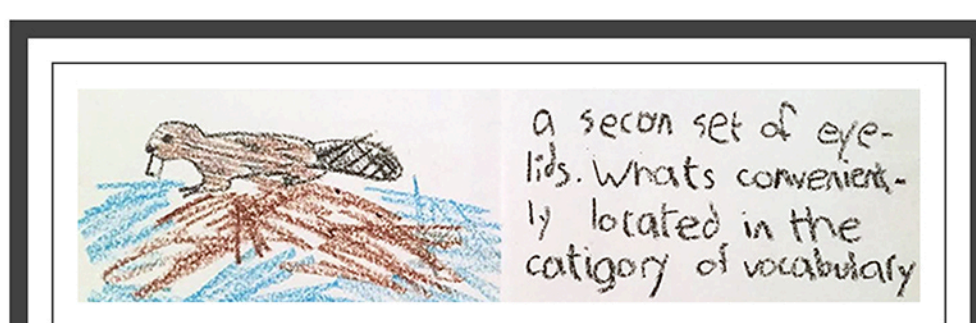
## II. UNDERSTANDING

It all began with Charlie Brown.

Though most kids rightly have no desire to be anything like that bald little loser, seven-year-old I was drawn to his precocious way of talking and overall lugubrious outlook. Like him, I had an unwarranted persecution complex and sense of superiority, and also nobody liked me.

"We're obviously separated by denominational differences," he told the equally unbearable Linus after discovering their difference of opinion on Santa Claus versus The Great Pumpkin. Denominational differences indeed, you morose little bastard. Yours is a denomination of one, and nobody wants to join you.

Needless to say, I was hooked. I began incorrectly using words well beyond my grasp at every opportunity. Just look at this report I did in first grade about beavers.



*Wow, what a doucher.*

I would chase that dragon anywhere I could. Pretty soon, I was sneaking off to the restroom for a quick bump of obscure adjectives off the toilet seat and shaking my ass on the corner for anyone who could get me a little taste of multi-syllabic verbs. I thought I could handle it. I thought I was in control. But the fact is that you're never in control when it comes to verbosity.

## III. ABSOLUTION

**M**ost 12-step programs encourage addicts to make an appeal to a higher power—one greater than the individual, through whom restoration is possible by giving oneself over to it.

Mine is the red pen.

They say that to step into the ring with a real Brazilian jiu-jitsu master is to have the ego completely destroyed. I've never done that, because I have the soft hands of someone who works at a digital marketing agency, but I have had my words eviscerated by enough teachers, editors and peers to not have a shred of ego left about my writing.

If you're comfortable with your skill as a writer, then there's no use getting butthurt when someone suggests edits. It has nothing to do with how good you are, because copyedits aren't for you; they're for the reader.

The most important thing is to consider that it might not be personal and that edits will more likely than not make you look better. There are only so many times you can be told by your high school lit teacher, "John, you're trying too hard to sound smart. I know you. You're not that smart. And shave that trash stache. You look like that time Tim Lincecum tried to grow one," before you start to listen. It's for your own good.

However, just because I've made my peace, collected a personal inventory of my shortcomings and started down the path of making amends with the people I've wronged doesn't mean the struggle is over. The struggle is every day.

*You've got this mess for life.*

Even right now, I want to close by saying something like, "Cutting through the effluvia of unnecessary language doesn't mean forgoing the compendium of strange and wonderful words on offer." However, I'll simply say that the English language is vast and beautiful. Make full use of it, but make it count. Otherwise you could end up like this guy.

---

**Suffice it to say I tend to adorn my sentences with an amount of filigree. Pomposity is my verbosity.**

*And this guy sucks.*