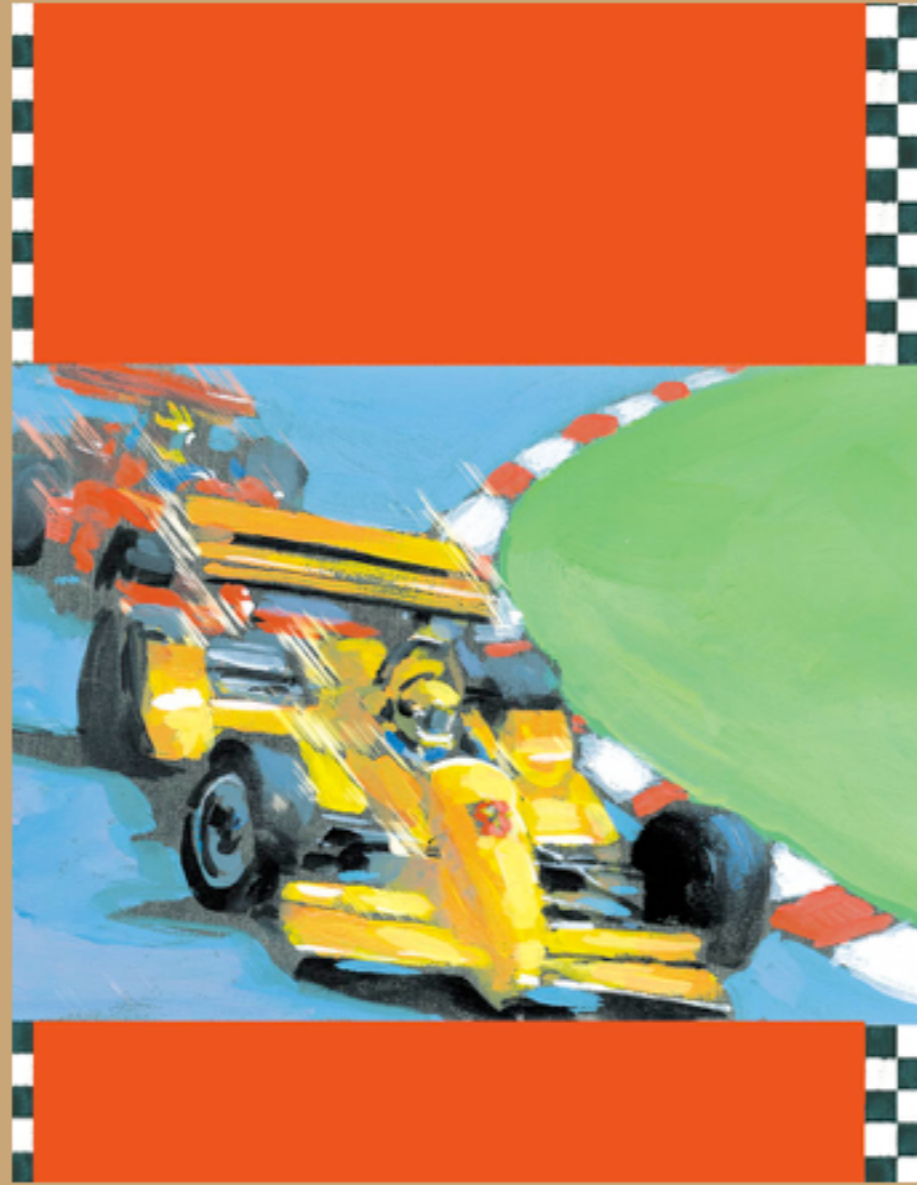# Track Down the

Weasel Words

$250 of unnecessary parts
I don't think so.

What are Weasel Words?

- Words everyone overuses.

- Words YOU overuse.

- Words that weaken strong writing.

- adverbs, usually.

- Overstating the obvious . . . and many more.

- The best tool to track them is your computer's search/replace function.

- Search for your weasel word, replace with the SAME word, but in all caps. Next pass, you'll notice it.

The littlest weasel

- This little weasel is small and common. Can you guess what it is?

Passive verbs

- Spot a passive phrase by adding "by zombies" at the end. If it makes sense, it's passive.

- "The tree was pushing at the earth below . . . by zombies." Doesn't make sense; not passive.

- The hat was worn at a jaunty angle . . . by zombies. Yep, passive. Change it.

Was and Were

We are a video generation. Why write "The cat was on the table" when you could write:

*The cat yawned on the table
The cat reclined on the table
The cat barfed on the table
The cat slept on the table
The cat groomed himself on the table, etc.

Statements of the obvious

He stood to his feet.

She clapped her hands.

He scratched his head with his hand.

He rose from his chair.

He stood up.

She crouched down.

He nodded his head in agreement.

She reached out and accepted the trophy.

That

The reason that no one wants to go is . . .

He knows that you don't like ice.

It's the hat that you wanted.

Miscellaneous Weasels

- ◆ Just, very, rather, started to, began to, suddenly, there was/were, some, "of the"

Personal Weasels

- Some of mine are:

- smiled, nodded, anything with eyebrows, pulled, slamming cartridges into machine guns

1 plus 1 equals 1/2

- Resist the urge to pile on. Because 1 + 1+1≈ 1/3.

Weaselly Punctuation

- Exclamation points—eliminate

- Em dashes and ellipses . . . learn the difference

Dialogue Attributions

- Eliminate them when you can.

- Use "said" rather than almost anything else.

- No physical impossibilities—"Blah, blah," she smiled.

- Use body movement/beats.

Adverbs in dialogue attribution

- JUST SAY NO. Do NOT write, "Get out of here," she said angrily.

- "Get out of here, you spleen-filled ninny!"

Interior Monologue

- This probably applies more to fiction, but if you're writing in first person, even in nonfiction, we are already in your head, so you don't need "thinker attributions."

Had, had, had

- Flashbacks and recollections require only two keys—and "had" is the key each time. One at the beginning of the time shift; one at the end at the shift that brings us back to present (story) time.

He looked out the window and saw Sally getting out of the car. He HAD invited her on a whim, never dreaming she'd come. He HAD dialed her number

dreaming she'd come. He HAD dialed her number, listened to an interminable amount of rings, and HAD nearly given up before she HAD answered and, after much pleading, HAD promised she would come.
And she had, because here she was, walking toward his front door.

(Delete all the HADS except the first and the last.)

"Omit needless words."

–William Strunk

Any questions?