

When Longer Isn't Better

The Error of Extendification

By Suzanne E. Rowe



to seem really smart. Often the extendification process moves from noun to adjective to really long, super-duper noun. For example, *ease* is a noun.

The ease with which she negotiated a higher salary was impressive.

Easy is an adjective.

Negotiating a higher salary was an easy feat.

Easiness is an extended noun.

The easiness with which she negotiated a higher salary was impressive.

What was wrong with *ease*, and why is *easiness* better? Next, try the trio that turns *danger* into *dangerous* into *dangerousness*.

The danger of the new strategy was lost on the shareholders. (noun)

The new strategy was dangerous. (adjective)

The dangerousness of the new strategy was lost on the shareholders. (extended noun)

Here's one more example, proving that *hope* isn't enough. We need *hopefulness*.

He started the job with great hope.

He was hopeful the job would be challenging and fun.

He was filled with hopefulness.

None of the extended words is necessary in the examples above. *Easiness* isn't even included in my favorite dictionary.¹ *Dangerousness* and *hopefulness* at least get mentioned, but only as derivatives or outdated words. *Dangerousness* by some accounts dates to Chaucer in the 1300s, but back then it meant "hard to please," rather than "danger."²

My original example proves that nouns aren't the only class of words subject to

extendification. *Extend* is a perfectly fine verb. So why did I read recently *extendify* in a well-regarded newspaper?

To extend his vacation, the associate called in sick.

To extendify his vacation, the associate called in sick.

Word Fancification

Legal writing style books repeatedly urge writers to use plain, short words. Some lawyers insist on reaching for longer, fancier words.

Question: What is the difference between *use* and *utilize*? Answer: Four letters and two syllables.

Yes, that's my personal pet peeve. Your pet peeve might appear in the list below. (If you don't have a pet peeve, I encourage you to adopt one.) The following list shows how many short words — three to five letters — can do the work of much longer, fancier synonyms.³

| Plain | Fancified |
|-------|-------------|
| begin | commence |
| buy | purchase |
| count | enumerate |
| clear | evident |
| end | expiration |
| end | eliminate |
| end | terminate |
| form | constitute |
| goal | objective |
| help | assistance |
| join | consolidate |
| let | afford |
| meet | attain |
| move | relocate |

In my world, *extendification* is a noun that means "make longer." It refers to the abomination of taking perfectly functional short words and making them much longer than they need to be. Say, taking *extend*, which means "make longer," and turning it into *extendification*, which means "make longer." The primary advantage of *extendification* is that it's longer than *extend*. Obviously, right?

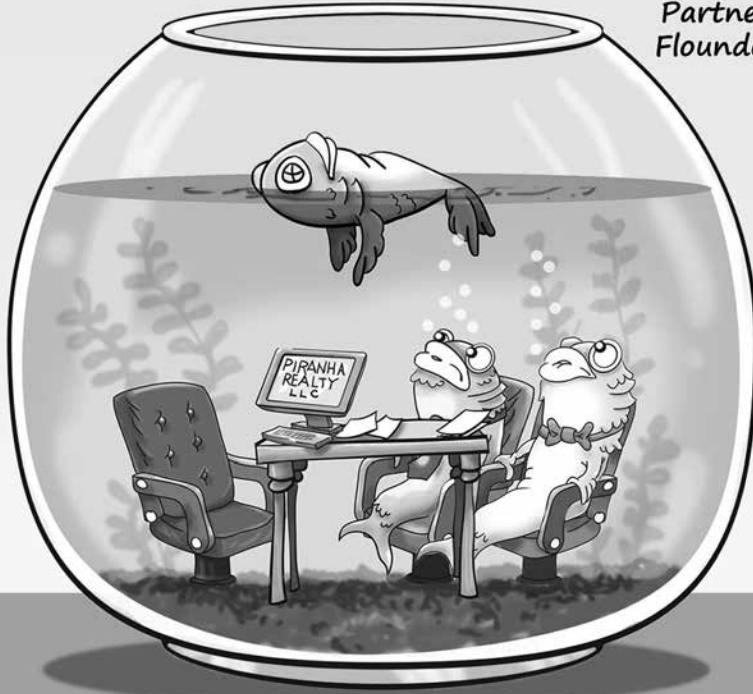
Extendification also accounts for the continuing trend of using a fancy, long word instead of its shorter, simpler synonym. An advanced form of extendification is extendifying sentences so that they are as long as possible and probably even take up full paragraphs, though that might just be laziness or a failure to understand basic grammar and punctuation.

Yes, I'm feeling cranky. Here's why.

Word Extendification

Basic extendification occurs when we take a word and stretch it out in an effort

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| | |
|-------|-------------|
| need | requirement |
| next | subsequent |
| part | component |
| plain | apparent |
| stop | discontinue |
| meet | encounter |
| see | observe |
| show | indicate |
| size | magnitude |
| start | commence |

Compare these next two examples. The first uses plain words; the second is fancified.

Her help will let us meet our next goal without needing to move to Bend.

Her assistance will afford us the opportunity to attain our subsequent objective without requiring that we relocate to Bend.

Maybe there is a minor difference between the plain word and the fancy version you prefer. I urge you to pull out your favorite dictionary to be sure. Then I urge you to ponder whether your reader will appreciate the difference. Maybe your reader is a nicer person than I am, but I get just a teensy bit annoyed whenever I get bogged down reading a document to look up a word that I feel pretty sure is there just to gussy things up.

Word Strings

Another form of extendification is the word string. Instead of using one crisp word (e.g., *because*), we use a string of words (e.g., *due to the fact that*). In this version of extendification, if one word is good, more words are better.⁴

| Word | String |
|----------|----------------------|
| because | due to the fact that |
| agreed | came to an agreement |
| if | in the event that |
| about | in regards to |
| to | as a means of |
| now | at the present time |
| promptly | in a timely manner |
| so | in order that |

Again, compare the following examples. The second is fabulously extended.

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To close the deal promptly, the parties agreed to meet now.

As a means of closing the deal in a timely manner, the parties came to an agreement to hold a meeting at the present time.

Sentence Extendification

A smart lawyer once gave this writing advice to my new law students: Write five words and put a period at the end. His point was clear. Short sentences are easier to understand. They are often more persuasive than long sentences.

Our writing culture is moving in exactly the opposite direction, with sentences getting longer and longer, as though we can't decide where to end a thought, so we continue writing until we run out of things to say or at least we reach the end of the paragraph and finally decide that it might be time to type a period.

See?

Conclusification

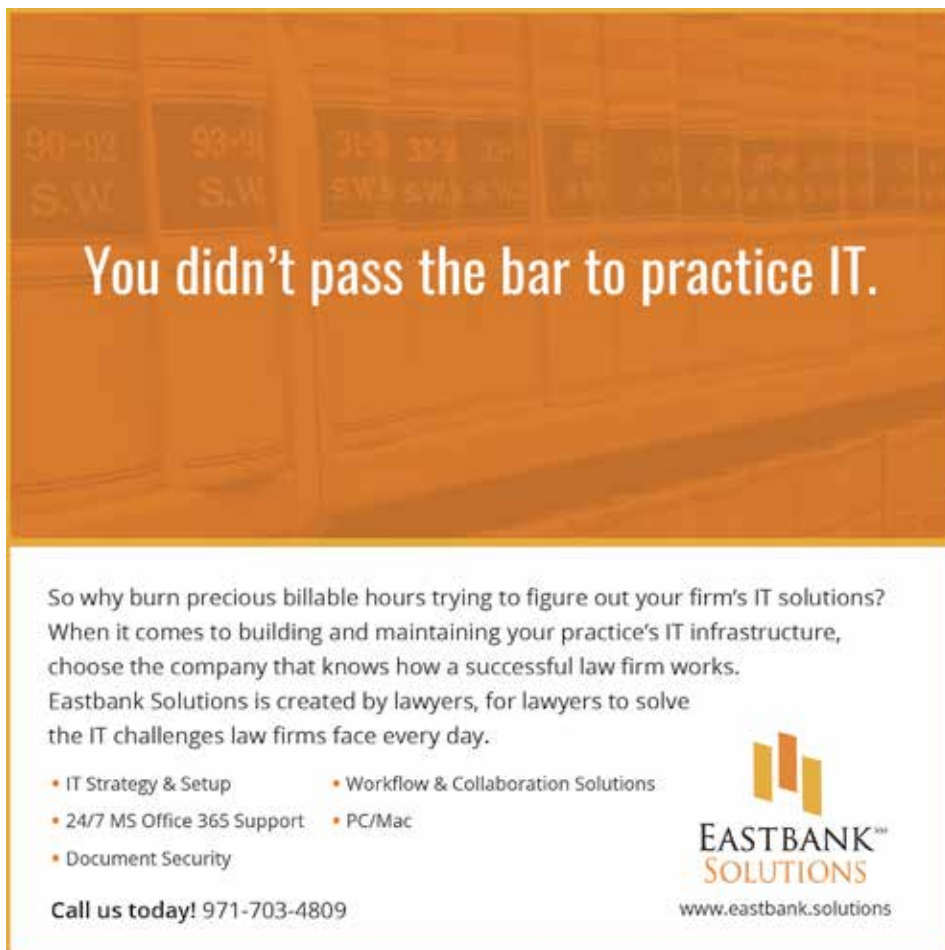
Longer isn't always better. Omit length. Use plain words. Omit surplus words. Use periods.

That's the conclusification.

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Endnotes

1. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (3d ed. 2010).
2. www.dictionary.com/browse/dangerousness
3. Some examples are drawn from www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/words/use-simple-words-phrases.
4. Some examples are drawn from Megan McAlpin, *Beyond the First Draft*, 2014, p.57.




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