Adverb Replacement Technique
By Wendy S. Toy

I love adverbs. They help me to express myself without filling my already cluttered mind with unnecessary verbs. However, on an expedition into writing sites and articles, I discovered that those beloved adverbs can be stated in a stronger way that will improve my writing.

Adverbs can tell how, where, when and to what extent (how much). Most adverbs that tell **how** will end in “ly”, and will modify a verb. (They *carefully* packed the box.) Other adverbs tell **to what extent** and modify an adjective. (The boy is *extremely* dirty)

Many writers will use the “ly” words (adverbs) to describe how a person speaks or the way (how) something is done.

Here’s an adverb example: “I won’t come,” Jane answered angrily.

Begin to think to yourself: How did Jane look when she talked? What type of facial expressions would a person make if they felt anger? Would she furrow her eyebrows or would she turn red and frown or would her eyes shoot daggers?

How would her tone (the way she speaks) show her anger? Would she grumble or snarl or whisper or shout?

What type of body language might you see from her? Would she cross her arms or stomp her feet or throw a book? Would she stand unmoving or would she turn and walk away?

When you begin to ask yourself these questions, you’ll be able to find other words that show what is happening, and don’t just *tell* the reader what is happening.

Our adverb examples after a few questions could be:

“I won’t come,” Jane grumbled, grinding her shoe into the dirt  OR

“I won’t come,” Jane whispered through clenched teeth.
The words “grinding” and “through clenched teeth” give you a picture of how Jane looked in her anger. The words whispered and grumbled show how she is speaking.

When you finish writing your story, it is easy to think “This is good!” and be ready to send it off. But the wise thing to do with writing is to put your story away for a few days (or longer). When you take it out again, you’ll be able to see your writing with clearer eyes. This is the time you can go through your story and find all those “ly” words that you wrote, then begin to replace those words with stronger verbs.

Another adverb example: The boy ran quickly to the swing set.

This is where you need to turn your back on those beloved adverbs to improve your writing technique. What are words that you can think of that mean “to run quickly”? You could use sprinted, darted, dashed, raced, scrambled, hot-footed and at least a half-dozen more that show “ran quickly” in a stronger way.

It is not always easy to come up with words to replace adverbs, so one item that you should add to your writing library is a thesaurus. A thesaurus is a book that lists thousands of words just like a dictionary would, but instead of giving a definition for each word, it lists other words that you can use in place of the word you looked up. You will find many helpful words inside this book when those adverbs are daring to take over your writing.

A few adverbs have a special place in writing, such as the word “suddenly” or the word “very”. We like to use these words when we want to grab the reader’s attention to the next detail or we want to show how important the next word is. Suddenly can be used, of course, but should be used sparingly. Most writers believe that very should not be used in your writing because you can find other words that will say what you mean in a stronger way. Before you decide to keep these words in your story, see if there is a better way to say it.

We all have different ways of writing and various techniques that we use. I’ve
developed a simple “Adverb Replacement Technique” that you can use to help you in your writing.

Here is an “Adverb Replacement Technique” you can use:

1. Write your story, chapter or article.
2. Put it away for a few days or a week.
3. Take out your work and look for any “ly” words you have used.
4. Ask yourself questions about your ly words. How does this look if I picture it in my mind? How can I describe this without using an “ly” word? What words can I use to make this sound stronger?
5. Look in your thesaurus for a good replacement word and put it in your story.
6. Read your story out loud to see if you like how it sounds.
7. Feel good. You have learned and implemented the “Adverb Replacement Technique”.

As with any kind of writing, rules can be expanded on or thrown out. There will be times in your writing when an adverb just feels right or sounds right. You’ll know when that occasion arises. In the meantime, apply what you’ve learned. Use this technique step by step, and see if your writing sounds stronger. Adverb Replacement Technique can make your writing stronger, just don’t let it hurt your love of adverbs!