

# The Perfect Word

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1. Charles James Stanford IV brushed a freshly manicured hand across the sleek mahogany desk and depressed the blinking intercom button.
2. Shorty Stanford raked rough palms over the splintered desktop, shoved aside a jumble of coffee-stained newspapers, and grabbed his phone.

The two opening sentences above are each just 20 words about a man sitting at a desk. The two men even share the same name, but how much do these men—and these sentences really have in common? Let's dissect them one word/phrase at a time to discover how the perfect word paints a perfectly unique picture.

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

**MOTION PICTURE**

**OBJECT LESSON**

**INTERIOR (or exterior) DECORATING**

**EMOTION POTION**

**THE BIG PICTURE (it's in the details)**

**THE UNDERLINING ISSUE**

Choosing precisely perfect words in every sentence ultimately results in a perfect paragraph, a perfect page, a perfect chapter, maybe even a perfect book—one word at a time.

## Study questions

1. Type out the first paragraph of your own work in progress in a word processing program. Highlight the character names or references in **red**. Highlight the verbs/action words in **blue**. Highlight the objects of the verb in **green**. Highlight the description(s) in **purple**. Highlight words/verbs that show emotion in **orange**. Highlight the details in **turquoise**. (Some of these may overlap.) **Underline** short, seemingly inconsequential words.
2. Are there colors missing from the "rainbow" of your sentence? If so, make a list of the colors that are missing and try to add those elements to your opening paragraph in a way that is subtle and organic.
3. Examine each highlighted word or phrase again.
4. Does your character's name and the way he thinks of himself (**red**) tell us something about the character? Can you emphasize this by tweaking the way you use your character's name?
5. Have you used the strongest verbs (**blue**) possible to show action that reflects the character's personality and emotions? Do the objects of your verb (**green**) reveal a new aspect of your character or setting?
6. Are your emotion verbs/words (**orange**) specific enough to make the reader feel what the character is feeling?
7. Will your descriptions (**purple**) and details (**turquoise**) paint a picture and set the stage for the reader, making them see more than is actually on the page?
8. Look at your **underlined** words and decide if you have selected the exact word that best fits your character and scene.
9. Now, start from scratch and write a "colorful" opening sentence for your next scene. Practice tight writing by trying to limit yourself to twenty words.