

## Let Tom Swift Inform Your Writing

Ever heard of Tom Swifties?

Maybe you're too young to be familiar with the classic Tom Swift adventures for boys. Or maybe you're a girl who never read a Tom Swift book nor cares to.

Tom Swifties are one-line jokes lampooning the style of Victor Appleton, the author of the original Tom Swift books. People started making jokes about his overuse of adverbs and the unnecessary taglines he wrote into his dialogue. Like the Polish jokes, they were so much fun that that a whole series of them became available for the pun-loving. The author of these classics, of course, laughed all the way to the bank. But that's a lesson for one of my marketing seminars, not this article on writing.

Tom Swifties were then. This is now. I haven't dared to go to the new books in the series but I assume that this outdated writing has been eliminated from them.

You'll want to minimize tags and adverbs in your writing, too!

An example from one of the Swift books will suffice to let you know what to watch for. (Thank you to Roy Peter Clark for the example.)

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Ned. "There's the agent now!...I'm going to speak to him!" impulsively declared Ned."

Even authors who swear that adverbs are always very, very good things to use and are reluctant to give up their clever taglines can see how, well . . . awful this is. In fact, I have to reassure people the quotation is real! Some of the writing that comes to the desks of agents and editors looks almost as bad. Here's how you can make sure yours doesn't:

1. Use taglines only when one is necessary for the reader to know who is speaking.
2. Almost always choose "he said" or "she said" over anything too cute, exuberant or wordy like "declared" and "exclaimed."
3. Cut the "ly" words ruthlessly, not only in dialogue tags but everywhere. You will find specific techniques for strengthening your writing in the process of eliminating adverbs in *The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success*. This book will also give you some computer tricks for making these edits easy.

*The Frugal Editor* will be released October 1, 2007 and is available for pre-order on Amazon.com now. Until you get the book, you don't have to know the reasons or the techniques for making the "ly" and tagline edits easy. As Nike is fond of saying, "Just do it!"

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Book News "Best Professional Book" award and the Book Publicists of Southern California's coveted Irwin Award. Learn more at [www.HowToDoItFrugally.com](http://www.HowToDoItFrugally.com).