



This writing tip is from Luis M. Luque, a writer-editor in the Division of Communication Science and Services. Luis has been working at CDC since 2012. Before that he served on active duty as a journalist/mass communication specialist for 20 years in the United States Navy.

Let me be blunt: I hope not. “Impact,” as a word, as an idea, as a goal, is nearly as overused as “like” in the mouths of, like, anyone under, like, 25 years old. The overuse of “impact” in all uses is spreading like a virus in a bat cave.

I won’t even touch on the horrific abuse of the word when you’re *not* talking about something that a meteorite might do (“His public health campaign will strongly impact the community.” Run for your lives!). Better synonyms in this usage include “influenced,” “affected,” “persuaded,” “prompted,” “motivated,” “inspired,” “encouraged,” and many more. Not to mention that the past tense, “impacted,” sounds too much like something your dentist needs to worry about.

So, what? What’s so bad about “impact”?

- When you use any word so often, it loses its, um, impact (or power, authority, appeal, effect, force, meaning, purpose, clout, distinction, importance, cachet, etc.). Think of it as that punchline you’ve heard too many times. You don’t laugh anymore. You’re more likely to roll your eyes. Well, I’ve been rolling my eyes at “impact” for years now. Decades, in fact.
- Lack of specificity. If I write that “The new policy had a strong impact on the amount of poverty in the city,” what does that mean? The reader can’t assume to know. The word “impact” has no clear direction. Maybe the new policy **increased** poverty. (A new policy making things worse isn’t exactly rare.) Wouldn’t it be better to write something more definite and specific? “The new policy **greatly reduced** the amount of poverty in the city.” Or “The new policy **had almost no discernible effect** on poverty rates.” Or “Despite the city council’s optimistic forecast, the new policy **actually led to a 20 percent increase** in poverty.” Tell the reader what they need to know.

Solving people’s problems is bound to have an impact!