

Fifty shades of beige

Written by 'Grammar Guy' By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
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Remember the beige craze of the 2000s? If you wanted to sell your house, you'd paint the interior walls of your house "bashful beige," "autumn wheat," "tasteful tan," "totally taupe," or "burnt oatmeal." Yes, if your house had fifty shades of beige, you'd sell your house lickety-split.

Now light gray is all the rage. No more bland sand! Bring on the "faded fog," "shy shark" and "silver lining" shades. I don't know how it happened, but light gray became the neutral go-to of the mid-2010s to the present day.

While neutral colors have pleasant, easy-for-real-estate undertones, they can come across as dull and boring. When it comes to language, there's a term called "beige prose." If you recall, I explored "purple prose" in the past. Purple prose is overly flowery language that uses tons of adjectives and words to describe something relatively simple.

Beige prose, on the other hand, is direct and is sometimes accused of being too plain. As a literary style, we have several notable examples.

I have to begin with my main man Ernest Hemingway, the father of anti-fluff writing. Instead of "beige" prose, he'd describe his writing style as "efficient and direct." In Hemingway's 1935 *Esquire*

essay entitled

Notes on the Next War

, he writes, "They wrote in the old days that it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. But in modern war, there is nothing sweet nor fitting in your dying. You will die like a dog for no good

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reason.”

You'll notice Hemingway is actually comparing the purple prose of the Victorian era with his own emerging style. No fluff here — just get-to-the-point honesty from Ernie.

If you want a modern example of beige prose, look no further than Suzanne Collins, author of *The Hunger Games*

. If you recall, I used

Twilight

author Stephenie Meyer as a modern purple prose-style writer. Meyer used an entire paragraph to describe vampire Edward's sparkly skin. Katniss and Peeta, on the other hand, get the beige prose treatment.

The Hunger Games protagonist Katniss Everdeen describes her home life in a matter-of-fact way: “Sitting at Prim's knees, guarding her, is the world's ugliest cat. Mashed-in nose, half of one ear missing, eyes the color of rotting squash. Prim named him Buttercup, insisting that his muddy yellow coat matched the bright flower. He hates me. Or at least distrusts me.”

Other notable pro-beige prose authors include Jack London, Cormac McCarthy, Kurt Vonnegut and Charles Bukowski. While I agree descriptive purple prose has some useful applications, I lean toward beige prose to keep the plot moving forward; otherwise, I feel like reading a novel feels like watching khaki paint dry.

Curtis Honeycutt is an award-winning syndicated humor columnist and author. Connect with him at curtishoneycutt.com.

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