

Quotes without adverbs

Getting the Story · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

When you quote someone, let their words convey the emotion. Do not describe the speaker's delivery yourself. For instance:

"You drunken bastard. I bet you ran over Toby. You killed my dog. I hope you die in the same agony," a distraught Mary Smith yelled and shrieked emotionally at the driver.

You should write:

"You drunken bastard. I bet you ran over Toby. You killed my dog. I hope you die in the same agony," a crying Mary Smith said to the driver.

Why? Because from the words Mary says it's obvious she is distraught, shrieking and emotional. That's why she's swearing, accusing and wishing an agonising death on someone. That is, her spoken words already convey being distraught, shrieking and being emotional. Just report her words and let the reader imagine the emotions involved. However, nothing in her words indicate she is crying, so it's legitimate to put in the adjective "crying".

Reprinted from The Wonderful World of Journalism. Written in the spirit of Simon Townsend's journalism craft advice. Visit simontownsendjournalist.com for the full archive.