
Let Me Count the-Different?—Ways

The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components.

—WILLIAM ZINSSER, *ON WRITING WELL*

I have nothing against the word *different*. Sometimes nothing else will do. For example, you offer me a bite of headcheese made from an old family recipe. “My,” I might say. “That’s...different.”

But if you’re stating or implying a number—twelve or a couple or a whole bunch—stop right there. Whatever countable things (plural) you’re talking about—bridges or sheep or charities—don’t call them different.

Consider these phrases:

A dozen different bridges

Two different sheep

A lot of different charities

Those bridges had better be different, or something’s awry with the laws of physics. Same goes for the sheep, even if one’s a clone of the other. And if you’re calling the charities different, don’t ask me for a donation. If you so cavalierly waste words, why should I trust you with money?