Clichés

Many writers want to create vivid images within a text, often through the use of similes (comparisons between two objects using “like” or “as”) and metaphors (comparisons made without “like” or “as”).

He was as cool as a cucumber.
Writing is thoughts on paper.

However, once these similes and metaphors become repetitive and overused, they have lost their effectiveness: they have become clichés. The problem with clichés is that they often do not create new or exciting images; as a writer, you should be striving to create memorable images.

As found in Mark Connolly’s The McGraw-Hill Workbook, the examples below show how to avoid cliché usage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cliché:</th>
<th>Improved:</th>
<th>Avoided:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We were amazed. The fluid dripping from under Tom’s car was not black but as white as snow.</td>
<td>We were amazed. The fluid dripping from under Tom’s car was not black but milk white.</td>
<td>We were amazed. The fluid dripping from under Tom’s car was not black but white.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following checklist contains a list of clichés that should be replaced if used in writing:

- apple pie order
- bottom line
- brutal murder
- cold as ice
- face the music
- fame and fortune
- final analysis
- flat as a pancake
- green with envy
- in today’s society
- last but not least
- long hot summer
- ripe old age
- sink or swim
- sneaking suspicion
- vast majority
- viable alternative
- vicious circle

Practice exercise:
Locate the clichés in the following paragraph and replace them with new phrases if possible.

In today’s society, the vast majority of college graduates may struggle with finding a job that suits their major. Often times after graduation, students must face the music and realize that they may have to look to other fields in order to find employment. A viable alternative may be the pursuit of fame and fortune through exploring career opportunities. You may be green with envy if your friends have less difficulty finding a job; however, the bottom line is that the job market is a vicious circle. By the end of the long hot summer following your graduation, you may have a sneaking suspicion that your prospects are as cold as ice.

Possible clichés to reword: “face the music,” “the pursuit of fame and fortune,” “green with envy,” “vicious circle,” “cold as ice” “After graduation, students often realize they may have to look to other fields in order to find employment.”