

'Up-Goer Five' text editor restricts writers to 1000 most commonly used words

February 1 2013, by Bob Yirka



THE UP-GOER FIVE TEXT EDITOR

CAN YOU EXPLAIN A HARD IDEA USING ONLY THE [TEN HUNDRED](#) MOST USED WORDS? IT'S NOT VERY EASY. TYPE IN THE BOX TO TRY IT OUT.

This is the group of people who decide the things that we have to do, the things we can't do, and how some of your money will be spent. There are 650 of them.

We pick which people will decide things for us every so often. Usually we do that every five years. Most people pick the people who will decide things for us by which party they want to be deciding things.

The 650 people pick a smaller group of to decide most of important things. Some of the people will agree with that, and some of the people will not agree with that. They sort

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE USED ONLY THE TEN HUNDRED MOST COMMON WORDS.
([PERMA-LINK](#) TO SHARE THIS WITH #UPGOERFIVE)

Someone describes parliamentary democracy. Credit: upgoer5

(Phys.org)—Geneticist Theo Sanderson has written a simple text editor that allows a writer to use only words from a list of the 1000 ("ten hundred" since "thousand" isn't on the list) most commonly used words in the English language, to describe things. He calls it the [Up-Goer Five Text Editor](#), in honor of a [comic created by xkcd](#), to describe a Saturn V rocket, using only the most common 1000 words in the English language. Sanderson has made the editor available online for free, which intrigued bloggers, Chris Rowan and Anne Jefferson to the extent that they've set

up a Tumblr blogger page called "[Ten Hundred Words of Science](#)," where they display the results of a challenge they've issued to scientists to describe what they do for a living using Sanderson's text editor. The results are thought provoking, interesting and quite often humorous.

Writers the world over spend their days converting scientific jargon into prose that most anyone can understand. They do so because the results of scientific efforts are interesting to a wide range of people – they want to know what's going on. Unfortunately, many people who might be interested in learning of such work, might not be able to make sense of what is presented in a scientific journal (or gain access to it without paying for it), due to the word choices used by their authors. To make the science more easily understood, such writers must use less jargon and more easily relatable analogies. Some might wonder why [scientists](#) and [academics](#) don't simply write their papers in ways that everyone can understand in the first place – the answer is that to do so would lengthen the paper to the extent that it would become unwieldy and it would take far longer to write, taking more time that would be better spent doing research.

The Up-Goer Five editor challenges such thinking, however, by causing those who use it to think about what they wish to convey in ways they likely never thought of before. It forces expression to come from a word driven approach, to one that is idea driven, which, when put down in [words](#), often sounds like the way ideas are expressed to children. That's not coincidental – children have a very limited perspective and background, so new information has to be given in a context that they are capable of understanding, and that generally means using a reasonably small vocabulary.

The Up-Goer Five text editor isn't likely to change the ways of the world, of course, but it might just offer some people an opportunity to consider how they express themselves in a more profound way, and to

perhaps cause them to gain some insight into how they communicate with others in general.

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