

A terrible tragedy?

30 de noviembre de 2022



News organisations, including the BBC and Sky News, often refer to horrible events as a “terrible tragedy”.

This is a mistake and suggests that the speakers do not understand the word “tragedy”.

A tragedy, by definition, is something terrible or horrible, so “terrible” therefore is a mistake and the word is redundant (redundante). When a mortal says “terrible tragedy” that person is revealing an unthinking mind (una mente irreflexiva). Such minds abound in second-rate (de segunda categoría/clase o mediocre) news organisations.

“Terrible” is an adjective and the rule is that one can use an adjective if the opposite (of the adjective) can also be used. So the opposite of terrible is “wonderful” or “nice”. Is a “wonderful tragedy” a correct phrase or gramatically correct? No.

Use an adjective if the opposite adjective makes sense: a good meal, a terrible meal, a wonderful piano recital, a bad piano recital.

So, do not use an adjective if the opposite adjective makes no sense: think about the meaning of the noun.