



Writing Center Academic Affairs

Using Strong Verbs

Whether you are competing for a job, a client, or the attention of a busy audience, one of the best ways of grabbing and keeping a reader is to use strong, descriptive verbs.

Compare the previous sentence to this one: To compete for a job, client, or busy audience, use active verbs to grab and keep the reader's attention.

Do you feel the improved strength and style in the second sentence? You can eliminate wordiness and boredom by replacing “**to be**” verbs with more powerful ones. Of course, you would never want to cut out ALL forms of “**to be**” (**am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been**), but analyze the distribution of weak and strong verbs in your writing and then edit for maximum impact on your audience.

You can also condense and strengthen sentences by editing strings of prepositional phrases and using a strong verb instead.

- **Weak:** I was a manager of a group of six people.
- **Strong:** I managed a six-person group.
- **Weak:** She was responsible for collecting all the data for the school project.
- **Strong:** She collected all the school project data.

About Passive Voice

Passive voice constructions frequently annoy many readers. Or, to put it passively, many readers are annoyed by this type of sentence construction. (There's that “be” verb again, followed by the past participle of another perfectly good verb!)

- **Passive:** Customers should be seated no later than five minutes after they enter the diner.
- **Active:** The hostess should seat customers no later than five minutes after they enter.
- **Passive:** Teachers are accused by many parents of treating students unfairly.
- **Active:** Many parents accuse teachers of treating students unfairly.

By the way, passive voice is not actually grammatically incorrect — it's just more wordy. It can come in handy at times when you don't know the subject of the verb, or when you don't need to mention or emphasize it. For example...

The bank was robbed Tuesday at midnight.

Or

Our local congressman was recently caught in a compromising position.

In these two sentences, passive voice is the simplest way to state the facts.

Some Strong Verbs

abolish	create	evolve	offer	regard
accomplish	define	exhibit	operate	represent
achieve	delegate	exist	organize	resemble
act	deliver	expedite	outline	reveal
administer	demand	experience	overcome	serve
analyze	describe	expose	personify	solve
appear	design	express	persuade	state
argue	develop	impact	portray	streamline
assume	discuss	impress	present	struggle
base	display	incorporate	preserve	suffer
believe	distinguish	influence	presume	supervise
challenge	educate	inquire	prioritize	supply
claim	embody	install	process	symbolize
coach	emerge	involve	project	tackle
consider	encourage	launch	promote	transform
consolidate	eradicate	maintain	recommend	undergo
contradict	establish	manage	reflect	upgrade
convey	evoke	note	refute	value

Examples

1. He was a strong king.
Revised: He reigned as a strong king.
2. Tolstoy is recognized as one of the most influential Russian novelists.
Revised: Readers recognize Tolstoy as one of the most influential Russian novelists.
3. I was the supervisor of a multi-million dollar advertising campaign.
Revised: I supervised a multi-million dollar advertising campaign.
4. She was responsible for managing fourteen full-time employees.
Revised: She managed fourteen full-time employees.