

WRITING CENTER

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

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

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.