

tipsheet

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Want to make your writing more concise and clear?

To do so, limit your use of the “to be” verb. Replace it, instead, with shorter, more active verbs that focus on action. Writing with excessive use of “to be” verbs tends to feel unimaginative and dull.

What is a “to be” verb?

Forms of the “to be” verb include the following: *is, was, are, were, has been, will be* and *being*.

Some Examples

Unclear: One difference between television news reporting and the coverage provided by newspapers **is** the time factor between the actual happening of an event and the time it takes to be reported. The problem **is** that instantaneous coverage **is** physically impossible for newspapers.

Clear: Television news reporting differs from that of newspapers in that television, unlike newspapers, can provide instantaneous coverage of events as they happen.

Unclear: Lew’s disagreement **is** why I want to discuss the project again.

Clear: Because Lew disagrees, I want to discuss the project again.

Unclear: The implementation of the project **will be** next week.

Clear: We will implement the project next week.

Unclear: He wanted a medication **that was** prescribed by a physician.

Clear: He wanted a medication prescribed by a physician.

Unclear: The motorcycles **were** sweeping into the park like 1000-pound bees. The lead rider **was** a huge man and **was** hunched over the handlebars.

Clear: The motorcycles swept into the park like 1000-pound bees. The lead rider, a huge man, hunched over the handlebars.

How to Limit the Use of “To Be” Verbs In Your Writing

Circle all the forms of the verb “to be” in your message (i.e. *is, was, are, were, has been, will be* and *being*). Next, replace them with shorter, more active verbs that focus on the actions you wish to express.

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