

REMOVING *BE*-FORMS

To improve your writing, use *be*-forms sparingly. The box below shows common *be*-forms:

am	was	been	's (some)	wasn't
are	were	'm	isn't	weren't
is	be	're	aren't	being

➤ WHY YOU SHOULD GET RID OF *BE*-FORMS

Eliminating *be*-forms results in

Reduction of wordiness

Removing *be*-forms streamlines sentences, saving time and money:

It **is** to **be** expected that your homework will **be** submitted on time. —> You should submit your homework on time.

Avoidance of the passive voice

Passive voice looks like this:

Subject + *be*-form + past participle* + optional *by*-phrase

(Fred was kicked by Barney)

*Past participles look somewhat like past tense, but they do differ in some cases: *closed* and *vacuumed*, but *sung* and *written*

Avoid passive voice for

Easier Translation: Many people who speak English as a second language expect its usual word order: subject + verb + object.

Groucho **was** fired by Harpo. —> Harpo fired Groucho.

Better Precision: passive may omit the doer of an action

The trash needs to **be** taken out. —> Melvin needs to take out the trash.

More interesting word choices

Removing *be*-forms will automatically vary your verb choice:

The treasure **was** stolen by the pirates. The village **was** ransacked by the pirates. —> The pirates stole the treasure and ransacked the village.

☞ WHY YOU MAY SOMETIMES WANT TO KEEP A *BE*-FORM

If you choose to use a passive, do it purposefully and deliberately. The passive can be effective when you want to

Use present progressive

Present progressive indicates an action occurring at a particular moment. There really is no other way to say it in English and achieve the same meaning.

It is raining.

We are sitting in the classroom right now.

Avoid assigning blame

If you don't want to name a culprit, remove the doer by using a passive construction:

Mistakes were made.

Coffee was spilled on the report. (the boss did it)

Focus attention on the end of the sentence

People remember best what they hear last, so you may want to move the important information to the end:

I want the report to be written by Ben and Owen.

Follow the norms of your field

Some fields frown on the use of *I*. Get rid of *I* by using passive:

Sodium was added to the chlorine.

☞ HOW TO GET RID OF *BE*-FORMS

The following process will help you to find and remove *be*-forms

1. Identify *be*-forms either visually or by using the *find* function on your computer
2. Find the real action
3. Choose a strategy for getting rid of *be*-forms:

a. Turn the sentence around.

The dog **was** petted by the little boy. —> The little boy petted the dog.

b. Delete *be*-forms and repair the rest of the sentence.

There **is** a tarp over the hay to keep it dry. —> A tarp over the hay keeps it dry.

c. Combine content with another sentence.

Reese Witherspoon stars in *Pleasantville*. She **is** an award-winning actress. —> Award-winning actress Reese Witherspoon stars in *Pleasantville*.

d. Add an agent (doer).

Mistakes **were** made. —> Martha Stewart made mistakes.

e. Check for replacement words.

Mike will **be** twenty-one on Friday. —> Mike will turn twenty-one on Friday.

f. Rethink the meaning of the sentence.

I'm hungry. → I'd like a big piece of chocolate cake right now!