**Deep Editing**

**Save this reference for EVERY essay, paper, or paragraph you EVER write!**

*From Grammar Girl’s Editing Checklist* [*http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/*](http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/)

**Search for and correct the following common errors:**

**▢ WRONG WORD**

*affect*/*effect*, *lay*/*lie*, *sit*/*set*, *who*/*whom*, *toward*/*towards*, etc.

**▢ VAGUE PRONOUN REFERENCE**

**Confusing:** Bob annoyed Larry, but that didn’t stop *him* from asking for a meeting.

**Clear:** Bob annoyed Larry, but that didn’t stop Larry from asking for a meeting.

**▢ LACK OF PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT**

**Frequently Disparaged:** Everyone withdrew their money.

**Uncontroversial:** Everyone withdrew his or her money.

**Uncontroversial:** People withdrew their money.

**▢ MISSING OR UNNECESSARY CAPITALIZATION**

Capitalize proper nouns—the names of things such as the *Golden Gate Bridge*.

Lowercase common nouns—descriptions such as *that famous bridge*.

**▢ UNNECESSARY SHIFT IN VERB TENSE**

**Wrong:** John Wilkes Booth *barricaded* the door while Lincoln *is* watching the play.

**▢ SENTENCE FRAGMENTS**

Sentence fragments aren’t always wrong, but don’t use them accidentally.

**Fragments:** Because she was late. And I held the door.

**▢ MONOTONOUS SENTENCE STRUCTURE**

**Monotonous:** We were late. I called the office. Bob answered the phone. Bob told

Sue. Sue stalled the investors.

**Better:** I called the office because we were late. Bob answered the phone and told Sue, who stalled the investors.

**▢ ADJECTIVE DRIFT**

**Confusing:** The property has seasonal creeks and trail access.

**Clear:** The property has trail access and seasonal creeks.

**▢ UNNECESSARY ADVERBS AND PREPOSITIONS**

**Bloated:** I was *very* angry that Bob sat *down* on the wet paint.

**Better:** I was furious that Bob sat on the wet paint.

**▢ PARALLELISM ERRORS**

**Not Parallel:** Kids like singing, chatting, and *check* their phones.

**Parallel:** Kids like singing, chatting, and checking their phones.

**▢ PASSIVE VOICE**

Passive voice isn’t wrong, but active sentences are often better.

**Passive:** The bell was rung by zombies.

**Active:** Zombies rang the bell.

**▢ “THERE ARE” SENTENCES**

You can often improve on sentences that start with *There are*.

**OK:** There are usually 54 cards in a deck.

**Better:** A deck usually has 54 cards.

**▢ JARGON**

**Jargon:** You can often improve on expletive sentences.

**More Accessible:** You can often improve on sentences that start with *There are*.

**▢ MISSING COMMA AFTER INTRODUCTORY ELEMENT**

**Right:** In the past, we bought vinyl records.

**▢ UNNECESSARY COMMA**

**Wrong:** Bob likes pandas, and visits the zoo often.

**Right:** Bob likes pandas and visits the zoo often.

**▢ COMMA SPLICE**

**Wrong:** I ate cake, I played games.

**Right:** I ate cake, and I played games.

**Right:** I ate cake and played games.

**▢ RUN-ON SENTENCE**

**Wrong:** I ate cake I played games.

**Right:** I ate cake, and I played games.

**Right:** I ate cake and played games.

**▢ MISSING COMMA IN A COMPOUND SENTENCE**

**Wrong:** All my friends came over for my birthday Tuesday and Bobby visited me the next day.

**Right:** All my friends came over for my birthday Tuesday, and Bobby visited me the next day.

**▢ MISSING COMMA WITH A NONRESTRICTIVE ELEMENT**

**Wrong:** Shoes which are worn on your feet come in many styles.

**Right:** Shoes, which are worn on your feet, come in many styles.

**▢ MECHANICAL PROBLEMS WITH QUOTATIONS**

In the US, periods and commas go inside the closing quotation mark. Semicolons, colons, and dashes go outside the closing quotation mark. The position of question marks and exclamation points varies: They stay with their question or exclamation. Correct: She yelled, “Help!” I won a copy of “Wrecking Ball”! She asked, “Are you hungry?” Did he just ask, “Are we in Hungary?”

**▢ QUOTATION MARKS FOR EMPHASIS**

**Wrong:** “Free” soda on Saturdays.

**Right:** Free soda on Saturdays.

**▢ APOSTROPHE ERRORS**

Nouns take apostrophes to become possessive. Pronouns don’t. *It’s* means “it is”or “it has.” *Its* is the possessive form of *it*. Acronyms, initialisms, and years don’t take apostrophes to become plural (*CDs*, *1980s*).

**▢ UNNECESSARY OR MISSING HYPHEN**

Don’t hyphenate phrasal verbs.

**Wrong:** Log-in to your account.

**Right:** Log in to your account.

Do hyphenate compound adjectives. These mean different things: *silver jewelry cart* and *silver-jewelry cart.*

**▢ SPELLING ERRORS**

Remember to run a spellcheck. It’s obvious but easy to forget.

Search for these words and phrases to do a quick check: *there are*, *it is*, *its*, *it’s*, *your*, *you’re*, *their*, and *they’re*.

**Eliminating “To Be” Verbs**

In order to dig down deep and revise initial drafts, reduce the number of “to be verbs”: ***is, am, are, was, were, be, being,*and *been*.**

Before you mutter a snide, rhetorical question, *Didn’t Shakespeare say “To be, or not to be: that is the question:”? He used three “to be” verbs right there! If it’s good enough for Shakespeare, it’s good enough for me,* remember Shakespeare used only six more “to be” verbs in Hamlet’s next 34 lines.

Your goal is to reduce, not eliminate the “to be” verbs in order to write with greater precision and purpose. There. I just used a “to be” verb. Feeling better?

**What’s So Wrong with “To Be” Verbs?**

1. The “to be” verbs: ***is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been*** are state of being verbs, which means that **they unduly claim a degree of permanence**. For example, “I am hungry.” For most Americans, hunger is only a temporary condition.
2. The “to be” verbs **claim absolute truth and exclude other views**. “Classical music is very sophisticated.” Few would agree that all classical compositions are always sophisticated.
3. The “to be” verbs are **general and lack specificity**. A mother may tell her child, “Be good at school today.” The more specific “Don’t talk when the teacher talks today” would probably work better.
4. The “to be” verbs are **vague**. For example, “That school is great.” Clarify the sentence as “That school has wonderful teachers, terrific students, and supportive parents.”
5. The “to be” verbs **often confuse the reader about the subject of the sentence**. For example, “It was nice of you to visit.” Who or what is the “It?”

Adapted from Ken Ward’s E-Prime article at <http://www.trans4mind.com/personal_development/GeneralSemantics/KensEPrime.htm>

**When Can We Use “To Be” Verbs?**

It’s not that “to be” verbs are always bad; sometimes writers must use “to be” verbs to communicate exactly what the writer wants to say. In fact, these verb forms can be difficult to replace. When the verb links to the subject (the do-er) of the sentence as a state of being, it performs one of these five functions:

1. **Exists**−Is there any trouble? Yes, I am he (predicate nominative).
2. **Happens**−The meetings are over.
3. **Locates**−He was at the birthday party.
4. **Identifies**−Those children were friendly (predicate adjective).
5. **Describes**−That could be scary (helping verb)! He is being helpful (progressive tense). Those girls have been so mean (perfect tense).

Generally, writers should avoid using “to be” verbs in essays. “To be” verbs can appear more frequently in narrative writing. However, when writers can replace a “to be” verb with a vivid, “show me” verb in any writing genre, it certainly makes sense to do so. With a good “show me” verb, the reader (or listener) can picture the physical or mental action of the verb. The verb engages the interest of the reader and specifically communicates the nature of the action. But, not all non-“to be” verbs are vivid, “show me” verbs. For example, the physical and mental action verbs in this sentence do not use vivid, “show me” verbs: The boy sits down on the bench and thinks what to do next. In contrast, the physical and mental action verbs in this sentence do use vivid, “show me” verbs: The boy slouches down on the bench and studies what to do next.

So, how can we get our students to reduce or eliminate “to be” verbs in their essays to create precision of meaning, specificity, clarity, and just good old sentence variety? How do we get our students to use these vivid “show me” verbs instead? Try these five strategies:

**How to Eliminate “To Be” Verbs**

1. **IDENTIFY**− Memorize the “to be” verbs to avoid using them and to revise those used in essays: is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been. Self-edit by circling “to be” verbs in the revision stage of writing. Problem-solve whether a “to be” verb is necessary or not.
2. **SUBSTITUTE**−Sometimes a good replacement of a “to be” verb just pops into the brain. For example, instead of “That cherry pie is delicious,” substitute the “to be” verb is with tastes as in “That cherry pie tastes delicious.” Also, substitute the “there,” “here,” and “it” + “to be” verbs. For example, instead of “There is the cake, and here are the pies for dessert, and it is served by Mom,” replace with “Mom serves the cake and pies for dessert.” Let’s also add on the “this,” “that,” “these,” and “those” + “to be” verbs. Finally, strong linking verbs can replace “to be” verbs. For example, instead of “That was still the best choice,” substitute the “to be” verb was with the linking verb remained as in “That remained the best choice.”
3. **CONVERT**− Start the sentence differently to see if this helps eliminate a “to be” verb. For example, instead of “Charles Schulz was the creator of the Peanuts cartoon strip,” convert the common noun creator to the verb created as in “Charles Schulz created the Peanuts cartoon strip.”
4. **CHANGE**−To eliminate a “to be” verb, change the subject of the sentence to another noun or pronoun in the sentence and rearrange the order of the sentence. For example, instead of “The car was stopped by a police officer,” change the complete subject, the car, to a police officer to write “A police officer stopped the car.” Also, add in a different sentence subject to eliminate a “to be” verb. For example, instead of “The books were written in Latin,” add in a different sentence subject, such as “authors” to change the passive voice to the active voice and write “Authors wrote the books in Latin.”  Lastly, starting the sentence with a different word or part of speech will help eliminate the “to be” verb. For example, instead of “The monster was in the dark tunnel creeping,” rearrange as “Down the dark tunnel crept the monster.”
5. **COMBINE**−Look at the sentences before and after the one with the “to be” verb to see if combining the sentences will eliminate the “to be” verb. For example, instead of “The child was sad. The sensitive child was feeling that way because of the news story,” combine as “The news story saddened the sensitive child.”

**Finally, use a Computer to Proofread BEFORE You Submit an Essay**

1. Use the **Find** **function** on Microsoft Word. From the Home tab, it’s in the upper right corner. Type in the bold words below, find, and fix them.
	1. **There are/There is**: Rewrite the sentence to put the subject first.
	2. **This**: Add the noun that *This* refers to
	3. **Everyone/Everybody**: Check the pronoun later in the sentence. Change they/their to he/she or his/her. See Grammar Girl #3.
	4. **You**: Change to third person.
	5. **Very/So**: delete
2. Run **Spelling & Grammar Check**. From the Review tab, choose Spelling and Grammar on the far left.
	1. Do NOT ignore anything underlined in red or green.
	2. Read the comment for green underlines and fix the sentence.
	3. Refer to Grammar Girl for green underlines you don’t understand; highlight it if you still don’t know how to fix it, and ask me when I get to you. (Don’t sit there waiting. Move on to the next problem.)
3. Read back through your **ENTIRE text**. Be aware of all points on the Grammar Girl checklist. Fix problems. Especially look for the following points that grammar check doesn’t always find: Monotonous Sentence Structure, Adjective Drift, Unnecessary Adverbs and Prepositions, Parallelism, Passive Voice, Jargon