**“Be” Verbs**

I am. You are. He is. The state of *being* is essential to life…Thus, it is impossible to write without “be” verbs. But “be” verbs lack the panache, the power, the bam-wam-wam of more specific action verbs. Writing that relies too heavily on “be” verbs is often weaker than writing that employs strong verbs. Use this sheet to assess the use of “be” verbs in your writing.

1. Replace “be” verbs with stronger, more specific verbs.

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| **Weak and wordy** | **Strong and specific** |
| John **is** the type of guy who thinks he is always right. | John always **asserts** his opinion. |
| It **was** an exaggeration. | Rola **exaggerated**. |
| Tommy **was** in an aggressive frame of mind. | Tommy **demonstrated** aggression. |

1. Eliminate “be” verbs that delay your point.

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| **Weak and wordy** | **Strong and specific** |
| She struggled to find the door **that was** in the dark. | She struggled to find the door in the dark. |
| He did not want to admit **that he was** ignorant. | He did not want to admit his ignorance. |
| She ate the food that was in the fridge. | She ate the food from the fridge. |

1. Replace nouns with verbs.

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| **Weak and wordy** | **Strong and specific** |
| He **was** the driver of the cab. | He **drives** the cab. |
| She **is** a fighter in the war. | She **fights** in the war. |
| The cat **is** a star in the film. | The cat **stars** in the film. |

1. Use “be” verbs to help you recognize sentences in passive voice. In passive voice the subject of the sentence doesn’t act, but rather is acted upon. It often creates confusion by obscuring the agent who completes the action. Also, passive voice usually isn’t as natural or as engaging to read as active voice. (For more information on passive voice Google “Purdue Owl active and passive voice” and click on the first result.)

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| **Weak and wordy** | **Strong and specific** |
| She **was flung** from the bus by the angry crowd. | The angry crowd **flung** her from the bus. |
| He **was hated** all over the world. | People all over the world **hated** him. |
| The hamster **was fed** meatballs by the small boy. | The small boy **fed** the hamster meatballs. |

Of course, there is always a time and a place for “be” verbs. If you can make a good case to yourself about why you are using one, then go ahead and keep it. But if a stronger, more specific verb stands at the ready, scrap your “be” verb.