

The verb “be” can be conjugated into the forms charted below. No matter the particular incarnation of it, the word really only means that something...is, which is to say, that it exists or is in a particular state of being. This is boring. When the verb of a sentence notes only that the subject “is,” very little is communicated. While some uses of “to be” verbs work well, many appearances of the verbs can be manipulated to achieve a more descriptive, tighter language.

“To be” verbs in the passive voice

“The Harry Potter books have been read by children and parents alike.”

Notice who does what in this sentence: The children and parents read. The books do nothing.

Instead, activate the sentence by moving the “doer” (the agent) to the subject position

“Children and parents alike have read the Harry Potter books.”

“To be” verbs in unnecessarily progressive formations

“Then I was running to the endzone.”

The important, action-packed verb is “running.” The pointless word is “was.”

Instead, drop the helping verb and the –ing (and alter the verb as needed)

“Then I ran to the endzone.”

Another example

“When she discusses epistemology, Jones is referring to issues of knowledge.”

Convert the clause to describe the subject, then follow up with the main clause in which the subject performs an active verb

“Referring to issues of knowledge, Jones discusses epistemology.”