

The Writing Center

DLA: Editing out “To Be” Verbs



This DLA is a writable PDF form. You can enter your answers directly into this document.

YOU MUST DOWNLOAD AND SAVE THIS FILE TO YOUR COMPUTER.

Do not complete this form in a web browser. You will not be able to save your work.

Student Name:

Important Note

To get completion credit for this DLA, make sure you complete all the required activities. If you'd like help while working on a specific DLA, you can meet with a specialist at the Writing Center. Keep in mind that you might need to schedule a second appointment to review your work, check your understanding, and get your completion credit. You can only review **ONE** DLA per appointment. (Check the last section of this DLA for information on making your appointment and receiving completion credit for your work).

Activities (approximately 1 hour)

Read the information, complete the activities that follow, and be prepared to discuss your answers when you meet with a tutor.

The Forms of “To Be”

Before we move on to any activities, you should know all eight forms of “to be”: *am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been*. This will help you begin to recognize them in your own writing. The chart below lists all forms of “to be” to look out for.

Case	Present forms of “to be”	Past forms of “to be”
I	<i>Am</i>	<i>Was</i>
She, He, It	<i>Is</i>	<i>Was</i>
They, We	<i>Are</i>	<i>Were</i>
You	<i>Are</i>	<i>Were</i>
Other Forms of “To Be”	<i>Be, Being</i>	<i>Been</i>

Why Do We Use “To Be” So Often?

Unknowingly, writers over-rely on “to be” verbs because some of our most common sentence construction techniques rely upon them. These have made “to be” verbs some of the most commonly used verbs in English. However, because “to be” is a static verb, showing no action, it is easy to use but adds very little to a writer's sentences. Look at how many ways we use “to be”:

1. Using “to be” verbs links subjects to adjectives easily (but vaguely): *He is a handsome man. (What about him is handsome?)*
2. Progressive tenses require the use of “to be”: *The student was working on his essay for six hours last night.*
3. Passive voice* requires the use of “to be”: *Votes were collected last week for presidential elections. (Who collected these votes?)*

*For additional help on the passive voice, see the Passive Voice DLA.

4. Contractions often “hide” the use of “to be” verbs so we may not notice them: *She's (she is) a wonderful volunteer at the animal shelter. (See number one above.)*

Why Should We Avoid “To Be”?

First, not all use of “to be” verbs is forbidden. Sometimes our writing may require it. For example, if the present progressive is the best verb tense to use in a sentence you are writing, then use it. Or maybe you do not have a subject and, therefore, must use passive voice.

However, often a simple past or present tense verb does the same job in fewer words and with more impact. And often you can change passive to active voice. Other times, you can take a noun and use it in its verb form.

What is the point of all this? “To be” verbs zap your sentences of detail and liveliness, and unfortunately, writers often over-rely on these verbs. When we put a bunch of dull verbs together in an entire essay, this can make for quite a snooze fest for your readers. Take a look at these examples:

Weak: The survivors were provided protection in the abandoned jail.

Strong: The abandoned jail provided protection for the survivors.

Weak: Rick was the leader of a large group of survivors.

Strong: Rick led a large group of survivors.

Weak: Michonne is a protector of the group because she can use a sword expertly.

Strong: Michonne, a protector of the group, uses a sword expertly.

How Do I Edit out “To Be” Verbs from My Writing?

Learning to edit out “to be” verbs, like anything else, requires a bit of focus and attention to detail. First, circle or highlight all forms of “to be” in your writing. Though it may seem tedious, it allows you to see how often you use these verbs and choose better verbs when possible. In time, your brain will begin selecting active verbs more often, and this process becomes easier.

Once you have discovered your “to be” verbs, consider the following revision techniques.

1. Think of another verb that relates to the content of the sentence. (Use a dictionary or thesaurus for help discovering new vocabulary words).

Weak: *The Walking Dead* is set in Savannah, Georgia.

Strong: *The Walking Dead* takes place in Savannah, Georgia.

2. Look for a word in the sentence that can be changed into the main verb. **Weak:** Lori was responsible for creating a huge disaster in the group. **Strong:** Lori created a huge disaster in the group.

3. If the “to be” verb only links a subject and adjective, omit the “to be” verb, place the adjective next to the noun, and connect this phrase to another sentence.

Weak: He is sensitive. It would be hard for him to survive the harsh realities of a zombie outbreak.

Strong: The sensitive man may not survive the harsh realities of a zombie outbreak.

4. Change passive voice to active voice.

Weak: A zombie was killed mercilessly by the Governor.

Strong: The Governor killed a zombie mercilessly.

5. Eliminate repeated words, phrases, or ideas by creating appositives.

Weak: Merle taught Daryl how to use a crossbow. However, Merle is an untrustworthy character.

Strong: Merle, an untrustworthy character, taught Daryl how to use a crossbow.

6. Restructure the sentence by creating a phrase that will eliminate the “to be” verb.

Weak: I had planned to be on vacation this week, but the zombie takeover changed my plans.

Strong: The zombie takeover changed my vacation plans this week.

Strong: The zombie takeover began last week, ruining my vacation plans.

Activities

Check off each box once you have completed the activity.

☐ 1. Online Quiz

Go to <http://tinyurl.com/tobeverbsdlaquiz> and take the To Be Verbs quiz. You must score at least 75% on the quiz before meeting with a specialist. After you complete the task, please take a screenshot of the page that has your score and show it to your specialist. Do not exit the quiz until you take the screenshot.

☐ 2. Answer the Questions

Review the information above on editing out the “to be” verb. Then answer the following questions.

a. List the eight forms of “to be.”

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b. Why should writers avoid the use of “to be” verbs?

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☐ 3. Rewrite Sentences

Rewrite the following sentences, editing out the “to be” verbs. Make sure to review the techniques discussed earlier. Some sentences may have more than one form of “to be.”

a. Shane was one of the first main characters to die.

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b. Audiences were shocked at the way Shane died. His death varied from the graphic novel considerably.

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c. It seemed like Lori was also going to be a main character throughout the series.

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d. Hershel is hopeful and sees the good in humanity.

e. The Governor is almost an exact opposite character of Hershel. He is very evil.

Choose 4a or 4b Below

☐ 4a. Rewrite Sentences from Your Own Writing

Take out one of your essays. Choose a paragraph and circle or highlight all forms of “to be.” Then rewrite the sentences on a Word document or sheet of paper, editing out the “to be” verbs.

If you do not have your own writing samples to work with, please complete the supplemental activity below (4b).

☐ 4b. Rewrite Sentences from the Excerpts Below

Read through the excerpts below from the article “In *The Walking Dead* Season Finale, It’s Bye-Bye Hamlet, Hello, Rick 2.0” by Allen St. John **and circle or highlight** all forms of “to be.” Then **revise** the sentences editing out the forms of “to be.”

Even though its cast features more than a dozen characters, *The Walking Dead* is a story about Rick Grimes. In the first episode Rick is in a hospital bed with a gunshot wound. In the last episode he is changing into The Rickinator.

The fascinating—and frustrating—thing about Rick Grimes is that he’s always been Hamlet of the Post-Apocalypse. He is very indecisive. He is the guy who handcuffs Merle Dixon. He is the guy who risks his neck to come back to try to rescue him.

He is the guy who makes peace with The Governor and the guy who is able to kill his best friend. Until this episode, Rick himself could never come to terms with both sides of his persona. As he tried to hold on to vestiges of the old world in the face of a scary new one, his yin and yang were in perpetual conflict. If Shakespeare wrote about zombies, he would have created Rick Grimes.

☐ 5. Review the DLA/Receive Completion Credit

1. Go to [EAB Navigate](#) and make an appointment (online or in-person).
2. Attend your session and be prepared to explain your understanding of the information you've learned in the DLA. Consider the main concept you learned and how you might use this in your future assignments/classes.
3. If your professor asks you to provide proof, you can review the "appointment summary report" through EAB Navigate (app or desktop). You will find all Writing Center appointments under "appointment summary reports" (app or desktop). Look for the summary report for your DLA appointment. This is where your writing specialist will indicate the title of your DLA and state whether it is "completed" or "not completed." If it is marked as "not completed," book a follow up appointment to complete.

Note: Appointment summary reports are also sent weekly to your instructor on record. If there is an issue, please contact us at writingcenter@mtsac.edu or (909) 274-5325.

If you are an individual with a disability and need a greater level of accessibility for any document in The Writing Center or on The Writing Center's website, please contact the Mt. SAC Accessible Resource Centers for Students, access@mtsac.edu, (909) 274-4290.

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