

Using Strong Verbs

Whether you are competing for a job, a client, or the attention of a busy audience, one of the best ways of grabbing and keeping a reader is to use strong, descriptive verbs.

Compare the previous sentence to this one:

To compete for a job, client, or any busy audience, use active verbs to grab and keep the reader's attention.

Do you feel the improved strength and style in the second sentence? You can eliminate wordiness and boredom by replacing "to be" verbs with more powerful ones. Of course, you would never want to cut out ALL forms of "to be" (*am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been*), but analyze the distribution of weak and strong verbs in your writing and then edit for maximum impact on your audience.

You can also condense and strengthen sentences by editing strings of prepositional phrases and using a strong verb instead.

Weak: I was a manager of a group of six people.

Strong: I managed a six-person group.

Weak: She was responsible for collecting all the data for the school project.

Strong: She collected all the school project data.

About Passive Voice

Passive voice constructions frequently annoy many readers. Or, to put it passively, many readers are annoyed by this type of sentence construction. (There's that "be" verb again, followed by the past participle of another perfectly good verb!)

Passive: Customers should be seated no later than five minutes after they enter the diner.

Active: The hostess should *seat* customers no later than five minutes after they enter.

Passive: Teachers are accused by many parents of treating students unfairly.

Active: Many parents *accuse* teachers of treating students unfairly.

By the way, passive voice is not actually grammatically incorrect—it's just more wordy. It can come in handy at times when you don't know the subject of the verb, or when you don't need to mention or emphasize it. For example...

The bank was robbed Tuesday at midnight. OR

Our local congressman was recently caught in a compromising position.

In these two sentences, passive voice is the simplest way to state the facts.

SOME STRONG VERBS

Distinguish	refute	expose	exist	present
Inquire	accomplish	represent	express	base
Resemble	symbolize	influence	regard	act
Reflect	consider	contradict	value	educate
Appear	process	transform	analyze	undergo
Impact	discuss	preserve	suffer	struggle
Personify	challenge	eradicate	abolish	embody
Convey	exhibit	demand	offer	believe
Supply	presume	assume	experience	impress
Emerge	evoke	portray	display	organize
develop	claim	state	argue	evolve
note	encourage	describe	reveal	define
serve	outline	incorporate	achieve	delegate
administer	streamline	operate	create	establish
tackle	persuade	expedite	project	involve
consolidate	supervise	maintain	recommend	coach
prioritize	upgrade	install	launch	solve
design	manage	promote	overcome	deliver

EXAMPLES

1. He was a strong king.

Revised: **He reigned** as a strong king.

2. Tolstoy is recognized as one of the most influential Russian novelists.

Revised: **Readers recognize** Tolstoy as one of the most influential Russian novelists.

3. I was the supervisor of a multi-million dollar advertising campaign.

Revised: **I supervised** a multi-million dollar advertising campaign.

4. She was responsible for managing fourteen full-time employees.

Revised: **She managed** fourteen full-time employees.