



Energize Your Writing with Strong Verbs

Step 1: Replace *To Be* Verbs

It is virtually impossible to write without using *to be* verbs. However, most people overuse these verbs, and the result is lackluster prose. The problem is, *to be* verbs just do not convey the same dynamism as stronger, more exciting verbs. If you want to energize your writing, try these techniques:

1. Replace the *to be* verb with a more expressive verb:

Ex. The coach **is** loud during games.

Vs. The coach **shouts** during games.

Ex. The café's sandwiches **are** excellent.

Vs. The café **serves** excellent sandwiches.

Ex. The student **is** afraid of failing the test.

Vs. The student **fears** failing the test.

2. Change a noun into a verb:

Ex. Our uncle **is** the **driver** of the bus.

Vs. Our uncle **drives** the bus.

3. Combine short, choppy sentences:

Ex. The band's music **is** excellent. The lyrics **are** meaningful. The melodies **are** catchy.

The percussion **is** energetic.

Vs. The band **plays** excellent music, with meaningful lyrics, catchy melodies, and energetic percussion.

4. Do not overuse *there is, there are, there were, this is, that are, etc.*:

Ex. **There are** many apartments **that are** empty and need new tenants.

Vs. Many empty apartments **need** new tenants.

5. Replace a *to be* verb + a prepositional phrase with a strong verb:

Ex. Social media **is** influential for millennials.

Vs. Social media **influences** millennials.

6. Replace a *to be* verb + an *-ing* word with a simple verb:

Ex. The cat **was scratching** at the back door.

Vs. The cat **scratched** at the back door.

Ex. The dragonfly **was hovering** over the pond.

Vs. The dragonfly **hovered** over the pond.



Step 2: Avoid Adverbs

In his book, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, Stephen King exclaims, “I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs, and I will shout it from the rooftops.” He makes an excellent point. Rather than using a **verb + adverb combination**, it is better to use a verb that is strong enough to stand on its own.

Ex. He **went quickly** to the store.

Vs. He **hurried** to the store.

Ex. She **looked angrily** at her friend.

Vs. She **glared** at her friend.

Ex. He **messily wrote** his name at the bottom of the contract.

Vs. He **scrawled** his name at the bottom of the contract.

Step 3: Get Creative with Verbs

Still trying to think of better verbs? Here are four common verbs with stronger alternatives:

- **Said:** announced, uttered, suggested, stuttered, argued, bellowed, whispered
- **Looked:** surveyed, gazed, stared, glanced, squinted, leered
- **Walked:** sauntered, strolled, traipsed, tramped, marched, hiked, ambled, plodded
- **Went:** fled, passed, moseyed, left, set off, withdrew, took flight, set off

