REDUCING BE-FORMS

Improve your professional communication skills by using the following:

• E-Prime

• Active Voice
E-Prime:  $E' = E - e$

$E =$ the whole English language, $e =$ all to be forms

be  
been  
being

am  
are  
is  
was  
were

I'm not  
aren't  
isn't  
wasn't  
weren't
E-Prime: the value

E' makes you pay attention to every word that ends up in your final draft.

There is a tungsten screw in the center of the club to lower its center of gravity.

A tungsten screw in the center of the club lowers its center of gravity.
E-Prime: the value

E' automatically varies your verb choice.

There were many pirates who coveted the Aztec gold. They were looters and hoarders of the ancient treasure.

Many pirates coveted the Aztec gold. They looted and hoarded the ancient treasure.
E-Prime: the value

E' eliminates expletives (*it is, there is, there are*)

It is necessary to check your email when you come into the office each day.

Check your email when you come into the office each day.
E-Prime: the value

E' puts your writing into active voice.

The orcs were mown down by Gimli.

Gimli mowed down the orcs.
Beware of the passive voice.

It was midday. The bus was being got into by passengers. They were being squashed together. A hat was being worn on the head of a young gentleman . . . . A long neck was one of the characteristics of the young gentleman. The man standing next to him was being grumbled at by the latter because of the jostling which was being inflicted on him by him. As soon as a vacant seat was espied by the young gentleman it was made the object of his precipitate movements and it became sat down upon (72).

– Raymond Queneau, Exercises in Style (1981)
Recognize the passive voice.

*to be* + past participle (+ by phrase)

**to be** forms: am, are, is, was, were, be, been . . .

**past participles:** walked, kicked, eaten, understood, sung . . .

The copy machine was stolen by Tyler Durden.
Avoid the passive voice because

- It takes more time to read. (more words = more cost)

- It causes problems with translation. (Fred was fired by Barney.)

- It sounds too impersonal:

  The eggs need to be collected. (no responsibility)

  The report was written. (no credit)

  The $500,000 access road needs to be constructed. (no responsibility)
Use passives when you want to avoid assigning blame.

Mistakes were made.

Pepsi was spilled on the copy machine. (and the boss did it)
Use a *be*-form when you are using present progressive.

The rockets are flying.

It is raining.
Use passive voice if you want to move a complex subject phrase to the end of the sentence.

The rhizome, a modified underground stem used for storing water and nutrients, produces the leaves.

The leaves are produced by the rhizome, a modified underground stem used for storing water and nutrients.
Excellence in Education: In a November 16, 2000, letter published in its entirety (except for naming the recipient) in Washington (DC) City Paper in January, the human resources director of the District of Columbia Public Schools informs a female job applicant that an investigation into her criminal record has been resolved in her favor. According to the letter, DCPS accepted the applicant's documentation that the government had, for undisclosed reasons, declined to prosecute her cocaine distribution charge, her marijuana possession charge, her three dangerous-weapons charges, her shoplifting charge, her soliciting prostitution charge, and her destruction of government property charge (all during 1984-1992) and that the woman, thus with a clean record, is now eligible for employment with DCPS.

Chuck Shepard, News of the Weird
Use passive voice if your field requires it.

A shaker was placed on the roof and the building was shaken.

The effects of Jack Daniels on homework performance were measured.
Practice removing *be*-forms:

Improve your professional communication skills by using the following:

- Locate and mark all *be*-forms (hint: use the find function in your word processor)
- Determine the real action.
- Choose a strategy to revise the sentence.
Delete unnecessary words.

There are many students who love homework.

*Be*-form(s)?
There are *many* students who love homework.

Real action?
There are many students who *love* homework.

There are many students who love homework.
Reverse the nouns.

The Predator was eaten by the Alien.

Be-form(s)?
The Predator **was** eaten by the Alien.

Real action?
The Predator was **eaten** by the Alien.

The Alien ate the Predator.

Yum!
Use replacement words.

Tyler Durden will be a student at Cal Poly next fall.

*Be-form(s)?*

Tyler Durden will *be* a student at Cal Poly next fall.

*Real action? ???*

Tyler Durden will be *a* student at Cal Poly next fall.

Tyler Durden will attend Cal Poly next fall.

But we can't talk about that . . .
Add an agent.

The president was not informed.

*Be-form(s)?*

The president *was* not informed.

*Real action?*

The president was not *informed*.

The CIA did not inform the president.

But we can't talk about that either . . .
Combine sentences.

Jack Sparrow is the captain of the Pearl. He bought rum in Tortuga.

*Be-form(s)? Real action?*

Jack Sparrow is the captain of the Pearl. He bought rum in Tortuga.

Jack Sparrow, captain of the Pearl, bought rum in Tortuga.
Rewrite the whole thing.

The menu for Thanksgiving dinner is turkey and gravy soda.

*Be-form(s)?*

The menu for Thanksgiving dinner is turkey and gravy soda.


Martha Stewart will serve turkey and gravy soda for Thanksgiving.
REDUCING BE-FORMS

• Saves time
• Saves money
• Saves headaches