

The All-Powerful 'to be' Verb

Use it wisely, use it consciously, and use its power to your advantage.

(am, is, was, were, are, be, being, been) and don't forget contractions

First, cleanup: Choose a verb that accurately connects the subject to the action.

The paper was presented.
The teacher presented the paper.

The rumor is an example of the problem.
The rumor exemplifies the problem.

The woman is a prominent figure in the painting.
The woman figures prominently in the painting.

Second, expansion: Choose a verb that opens up to a story. Try to invite the reader closer.

My name is Bryan Sanders.
I respond to the name "Bryan Sanders" even when the conversation turns to politics and the new press secretary at the White House.

I am interested in language and computers.
A room full of primates typing on keyboards would not necessarily write *Hamlet*, however I remain fascinated by the possibilities found in studying language and computers.

I have been an English teacher since 1997.
Once a student there, I began my teaching career at Santa Monica High School in 1997; I joined New Roads School in 2005.

Third, conscious use: A well-timed 'to be' verb adds drama and emphasizes your opinion.
Some people discuss the Capulet and Montague feud as the chief source of Romeo and Juliet's untimely demise. Some prefer to put the burden of responsibility on fate and the cosmic forces that aligned their relationship. And still others will entertain the argument that words themselves worked as weapons, since "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." However, I maintain that due to his immaturity and rash behavior, Romeo **is** to blame.

Your Turn

My name *is* _____.

Revision without 'to be' verb:

I *am* interested in _____.

Revision without 'to be' verb:

Homework

In your next email or tweet or essay or report or brief or what-have-you, reduce your 'to be' verbs. Connect the subject to the action. Tell a story. And then, try to use the 'to be' verb on purpose. Use it with drama. Use it to convince your reader. I **am** certain you will have success.

--Bryan Sanders, New Roads School