

## ELIMINATING WORDINESS: PART 1, VERBS

### STEP 1: IDENTIFY WEAK VERBS

Weak verbs are usually **vague**, or **actionless**. They might also be **empty** or **informationless** (insofar as they do not contain much information), such as...

- To be (am, are, is, was, were, being, been)
- To have
- To exist

Weak verbs might also be verbs that appear in the **passive voice** (the verb to be plus a past participle), such as...

- Is believed
- Was seen
- Are thought to be
- Have been understood

### STEP 2: SUBSTITUTE WEAK VERBS FOR ACTION VERBS

**EXAMPLE 1: More remote, less densely populated suburbs and small towns in rural locations are likely to see considerable increase in their property values in the next two decades.**

1. Ask yourself: what happens in the sentence? The "event" in the example above is the increase of property values.
2. And, "*Who or what is doing the action in the sentence?*" The "**doer**" of the event is "**property values.**"
3. Rephrase the sentence with the doer near the beginning, followed by the active verb... "**Property values** in more remote, less densely populated suburbs and in small towns in rural locations will increase considerably in the next two decades."

### Some Key Terms Defined...

*The Passive Voice:* The passive voice is one of two "voices" in English grammar. It is formed by the use of the verb "to be" plus a past participle (which often end in "ed" in English). "The study was conducted" is an example of the passive voice. Note that in the example, we don't know *who* or *what* conducted the study. This is precisely why the passive voice is discouraged in academic writing: it can often be vague or confusing. Even when the passive voice includes information about who are what is doing the action, it is not recommended for academic writing because it "hides" the doer of the action at the end of the phrase, as with this example: "The study was conducted by senior surgeons at George Washington University."

*The Active Voice:* As you can imagine, the active voice is the opposite of the passive. In the active voice, the doer of the action in the sentence comes first: "Senior surgeons at George Washington University conducted the study."

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**EXAMPLE 2:** “The research was conducted by researchers at Penn State in the Department of Kinesiology and studied the effects of increased vitamin C levels on the recovery rates of patients who were undergoing physio treatments after having knee surgery.”

- Underline weak verbs...
  - “was conducted” is passive
  - “were undergoing” is both passive and vague
  - “having” is vague and empty
- What happens in the sentence? What does the writer wish to emphasize?
  - The main “event” in the sentence is study.
- Who or what is doing the action in the sentence?
  - Researchers in the Department of Kinesiology at Penn State.
- Move the “doer” of the sentence to its beginning. Make the “event” or focus of the sentence its verb.
  - **Researchers in the Department of Kinesiology at Penn State University examined** the effects of increased vitamin C levels on the recovery rates of patients who were undergoing physio treatments after having knee surgery.
- Eliminate any extra words – words that if you remove them, do not change the meaning of the sentence.
  - Researchers in the Department of Kinesiology at Penn State University examined the effects of increased vitamin C levels on the recovery rates of patients ~~who were~~ undergoing physio treatments ~~after having~~ *following* knee surgery.

## REFERENCES:

Kehrwald Cook, C. (1985). Loose, baggy sentences. *Line by line: How to edit your own writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.