

Aggie Grammar Guide: Revising To-Be Verbs

While **to be** verbs (**is, are, am, was, were, has been, have been, had been, will be, will have been, being, etc.**) remain useful and necessary in certain situations, gone unchecked they can slow your reader down and confuse your message. In order to write livelier, more engaging prose, consider editing out as many **to be** verbs as possible without losing meaning. Note **there + to be** is a common construction that you might want to revise because it could cause your reader to lose track of your subject.

Revision Strategies

Revision option one: Replace lone **to be** verbs or those connected to the verb **have**; AND/OR **there is, are, was, were, have been** constructions with a stronger verb.

- Example 1: **There was** nothing more isolating than being at a place I did not feel welcome.
- Revision 1: **Being** at a place I did not feel welcome **isolated** me most. (The verb became the subject “being” and the adjective became the verb “isolated.”)
- Example 2: Wheat **is known for being used** in both food cultures of Mexico and Italy.
- Revision 2: Both Mexican and Italian food cultures **rely** on wheat.

Revision option two: Replace **to be** verbs with a stronger verb and move information around in the sentence to enhance clarity.

- Example: If parents do not talk to them about sex, the media **is** the one **educating** them, but it **is portraying** unrealistic views of the sexual content as casual hook-ups.
- Revision: If parents do not talk to their kids about sex, the media **will educate** them through the unrealistic portrayal of sex, including casual hookups.

Necessary to be constructions:

Sometimes you need to use a **to be** verb as a linking verb to maintain meaning or describe something:

- Example: Thus, full hybrids **are** fuel-efficient, environmentally friendly and drive like conventional cars. (Emphasis on description)
- Example: She became so excited, reflecting on the moment, that her arms started to perform in the air **as if she were** on the rock. (Meaning)