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)