


Pruning

Prefer the verb.

“Verbs act. Verbs move. Verbs do. ...”

... Verbs strike, soothe, grin, cry, exasperate, decline, fly, hurt, and heal. ...


... Verbs make writing go, and they matter more to our language than any other part of speech.”



Donald Hall

Prefer the verb.

- Unearth buried verbs.
- Replace **to be** with **action** verbs.




Unearth buried verbs.

- Nominalizations are noun forms of action verbs. **Prefer the verb.**
- Nominalizations:
 - deaden dynamic language
 - lumber (require crutches, such as **of** phrases)
 - throw off readers' expectations (that the subject will define the actor, not the action)
 - result in weak, supportive verbs, rather than dynamic, powerful ones

Unearth buried verbs.


Beware words that end in the following:



■ -ion	■ -ant
■ -ence	■ -ency
■ -ment	■ -ent
■ -al	■ -ance
■ -ancy	■ -ness
■ -ity	■ -ture

Unearth buried verbs.

Beware other dead giveaways:



- to make
- to have
- of

Unearth buried verbs.

Rather than:

- have knowledge of
- held a meeting
- made the decision
- make provision for
- reach an agreement
- make an appearance
- take under consideration

Prefer:

- know
- met
- decided
- provide
- agree
- appear
- consider

Unearth buried verbs.

Change this:

- We **carried out an analysis of** the portfolio.
- The acts **were violative of** our contract.

To this:

- We **analyzed** the portfolio.
- The acts **violated** our contract.

Unearth buried verbs.

Change this:

- The **amendment** of any part of this contract may not be a valid **modification** unless **supportable** by express written documentation bearing the **signatures** of both parties.

To this:

- The parties may **amend** any part of this contract only if they both **sign** a written document that expressly **modifies** the contract.

Unearth buried verbs.

Change this:

- Rachel's **reliance** on last year's report **for its contention** that a marketing plan need not be explicit is misplaced.

To this:

- Rachel mistakenly **relies** on last year's report to argue that a marketing plan need not be explicit.

Unearth buried verbs.

Change this:

- Customer shall procure all items necessary **for the implementation of** this Agreement ...
- **Upon termination of** this Agreement, ...

To this:

- Customer will procure all items necessary **to implement** this Agreement ...
- Once this Agreement **terminates**, ...

Replace **to be** with **action verbs**.

Rather than:

- am able to
- were aware of
- is binding on
- was suitable
- is indicative of
- am in error
- be benefited by
- was applicable to

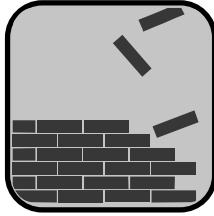
Prefer:

- can
- knew
- binds
- suited
- indicates
- err
- benefit
- applied

“Good writers avoid ...

... strings of sentences with only such verbs as **is** and **has** to prop them up.”

Tom Goldstein &
Jethro K. Lieberman



Replace **to be** with **action verbs**.

Rather than:

- We **are in agreement**.
- I **am in receipt of** your letter.
- She **is entitled to** leave as early as she wishes.
- This latest fiasco **is indicative of** your poor attitude.

Prefer:

- We **agree**.
- I **have received** your letter.
- She **may** leave as early as she wishes.
- This latest fiasco **indicates** your poor attitude.

Prefer the verb.

- “The stronger the verb the better the sentence.”

Charles W. Ferguson

- “Be-verbs lack muscle.”

Bryan A. Garner

