

## Replacing Vampire Verbs

"Vampires, werewolves, fallen angels and fairies lurk in the shadows, their intentions far from honorable." -- Jeaniene Frost

"Vampire verbs" suck the life out of prose, with *is/are* and *was/were* as leading offenders. Replacing these vampire verbs with action verbs creates a livelier and more readable text. First, help students notice how often these verbs occur in their text by asking them to circle each occurrence. Next, encourage them to set a goal—perhaps replacing half of the **to be** verbs with action verbs. Here are some strategies for making these substitutions, courtesy of St. Louis Community College.

Weak and Wordy	Strong and Specific
<i>The letter <u>was</u> offensive to Bob.</i>	Making a simple substitution: <i>The letter <u>offended</u> Bob.</i>
<i>Patterson's argument <u>is</u> weak.</i>	Re-ordering a sentence before changing the verb: <i>Patterson <u>made</u> a weak argument.</i>
<i>The American Red Cross <u>was</u> an organizer of the relief effort.</i>	Changing a noun into a verb: <i>The American Red Cross <u>organized</u> the relief effort.</i>
<i>The author's point <u>is confusing</u></i>	Replace a <b>to be</b> verb + an <b>-ing verb</b> with a single action verb: <i>The author's point <u>confuses</u> many readers.</i>
<i><u>There was</u> convincing support for this position in Sanchez's article. <u>There were</u> multiple details and <u>they were</u> all realistic.</i>	Avoiding overuse of <i>there is, there was, etc.</i> <i>Sanchez's convincing support for this position <u>includes</u> multiple, realistic details.</i>

If you are interested in more ways to banish vampire verbs, visit [https://www.stlcc.edu/Student\\_Resources/Academic\\_Resources/Writing\\_Resources/Grammar\\_Handouts/To-be-Verbs.pdf](https://www.stlcc.edu/Student_Resources/Academic_Resources/Writing_Resources/Grammar_Handouts/To-be-Verbs.pdf)

--Ben Miele, English dept.