

Avoiding Weak Verbs

Weak verbs are telling action words used so often in speaking and writing that they have become meaningless and boring.

Another issue with weak verbs is that they describe nothing to the reader, which makes the narrative vague and wordy. Besides being meaningless and dull, weak verbs can lead to passive voice.

Yes, it is impossible to write without using an occasional *are, is, had, feel, or was*. However, creative writing aims to replace most weak verbs with stronger, more robust, active verbs or phrases. Strong verbs will make the story more captivating and to the point.

Avoid “to be” and “to have” verbs. But there are other weak verbs to watch for.

Note:

This does not mean you cannot use these weak verbs. The goal is to mix it up and use stronger verbs. Do not make the reader read the same weak verb 200 times in your novel. Mix it up using stronger verbs.

A few common weak verbs:

are	look	see
come	loud	sit
feel	make	stand
get	move	walk
go	put	was
had	placed	went
is	said	

Issue: (made, go)

Sasha entered the living room and grinned. “Sam, don’t tell me mama *made* you *go* to church?”

The weak verbs “made” and “go” words made this sentence wordy and vague.

Fix:

Sasha entered the living room and grinned. “Sam, don’t tell me mama dragged you to church?”

Replacing “*made*” with “dragged” and deleting “*go*” gave the reader a better picture and made the sentence more engaging.

Issue: (moved)

Joe *moved* his toolbox from the car to the garage.

The verb “*moved*” is vague and shows the reader little.

Fix:

Joe hauled his toolbox from the car to the garage.

See the difference? Using words like hauled, dragged, lugged, or carted provides better imagery for the reader.

Issue: (walked)

Sue *walked* down the isolated beach.

The weak verb “*walked*” is so overused that it means nothing.

Fix:

Sue strolled down the isolated beach.

Yes, walked and strolled mean the same thing, but the word strolled is a stronger verb and paints a better picture for the reader.

Other word choices: wandered, roamed, marched, moseyed, drifted, etc.

Issue: (went)

Sue *went* to the hospital as soon as she ended the call.

The word “*went*” does not show the reader anything.

Fix:

Sue rushed to the hospital as soon as she ended the call.

Using strong verbs like rushed, hustled, dashed, or bolted provides better imagery for the reader.

Issue: (looked)

Joe *looked* at Sue and smiled.

Looked is another overused weak verb that means nothing.

Fix:

Joe turned to Sue and smiled.

Or even better.

Joe shifted his gaze to Sue and smiled.