

Style Revision: Verbs

Eliminating present progressive and
passive voice

Present Progressive Tense

- Present progressive tense describes an ongoing action.
- This tense is formed by using **am/is/are** with the verb form ending in **-ing**.
- **EX:** The sociologist is examining the effects that racial discrimination has on society.

Present Progressive Tense

- The best essays use **clear** and **concise** language.
- Unless you want to specify that an action is ongoing, you should replace the **present progressive** tense with a **simple present** tense verb

Correct the sentence...

- In act 1, Brutus is struggling with his moral conscience.
- In act 1, Brutus struggles with his moral conscience.

Correct the sentence...

- Throughout the play, Antony **is exemplifying** Machiavellian qualities.
- Throughout the play, Antony **exemplifies** Machiavellian qualities.

Correct the sentence...

- In *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare is highlighting society's flaws.
- In *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare highlights society's flaws.

Correct the sentence...

- At this point, Cassius is convincing Brutus to change his mind.
- At this point, Cassius convinces Brutus to change his mind.

Correct the sentence...

- In the play's final battle scene, Lucilius is pretending to be Brutus.
- In the play's final battle scene, Lucilius pretends to be Brutus.

Active vs. Passive Voice

- In a sentence using **active voice**, the subject of the sentence performs the action.
- **EX:** The people worship Caesar.

Active vs. Passive Voice

- In a sentence using **passive voice**, the subject receives the action expressed by the verb.
- Also, the agent performing the action may appear in a “by the...” phrase *or* it may be omitted.

EX: Mark Antony is feared *by the people*.

EX: Caesar is hated.

Active vs. Passive Voice

- Passive voice is formed by using a “to be” verb **am/is/are/was/were/be/being/been** with the past participle
- Past participles *usually* but do not *always* end in **-ed**.

EX: Brutus is **praised** for his honor.

EX: The Prince was **written** during the Renaissance.

Active vs. Passive Voice

- The best essays use **clear** and **concise** language
- Sentences written in active voice offer both **precision** and **clarity**
- Therefore, you should replace **passive voice** with **active voice**

Correct the sentence...

- In act 2 the conspirators are joined by Brutus.
- In act 2, Brutus joins the conspirators.

Correct the sentence...

- Caesar is offered a crown three times.
- The people offer Caesar a crown three times.

Correct the sentence...

- The crown is refused by Caesar each time it is offered.
- Caesar refuses the crown each time the people offer it.

Simplifying verb forms...

Step 1

Highlight all “to be” verbs

am

were

is

be

are

being

was

been

**you do not need to do this for quoted passages*

Step 2

**Identify instances where you have any form of
“to be” + the present participle (-ing)**

[the present progressive]

Examples:

Is constantly struggling

Is exemplifying

Is highlighting

Is showing

Step 3

Change the action into a simple verb

Examples:

Is struggling = **struggles**

Is exemplifying = **exemplifies**

Is highlighting = **highlights**

Is showing = **shows**

Step 4

Identify instances where you have any form of
“to be” + the past participle (-ed)

[passive voice]

Examples:

Are joined

Is offered

Is shown

Is assassinated

Are swayed

Step 5

Make the sentence active

[remove passive voice]

- 1) Ask, “Where’s the action?”
- 2) Ask, who is doing the action?
- 3) Name the person doing the action *before* the verb

Examples:

Are joined = **(Person) joins**

Is offered = **(Person) offers**

Is shown = **(Person) shows**

Is assassinated = **(Person) assassinates**

Step 6

Whenever possible, replace “to be” with a stronger, more *precise* verb.

Examples:

Antony is deceptive = Antony deceives

Brutus is honorable = Brutus exudes honor

Brutus is full of guilt = Brutus feels guilty