**What’s So Wrong with “To-Be” Verbs?**

1. The “to-be” verbs: *is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been* are state of being verbs, which means that they unduly claim a degree of permanence. For example, “I am hungry.” For most Americans, hunger is only a temporary condition.

2. The “to-be” verbs claim absolute truth and exclude other views. “Classical music is very sophisticated.” Few would agree that *all* classical compositions are *always* sophisticated.

3. The “to-be” verbs are general and lack specificity. A mother may tell her child, “Be good at school today.” The more specific “Don’t talk when the teacher talks today” would probably work better.

4. The “to-be” verbs are vague. For example, “That school is great.” Clarify the sentence as “That school has wonderful teachers, terrific students, and supportive parents.”

5. The “to-be” verbs often confuse the reader about the subject of the sentence. For example, “It was nice of you to visit.” Who or what is the “It?”

Adapted from Ken Ward’s E-Prime article at <http://www.trans4mind.com/personal_development/GeneralSemantics/KensEPrime.htm>

**Problem-Solving Strategies to Eliminate the** **“To-Be” Verb**

1. **Substitute**-Sometimes a good replacement just pops into your brain. For example, instead of “That cherry pie sure is good,” substitute the “to-be” verb is with tastes as in “That cherry pie sure tastes good.”

2. **Rearrange**-Start the sentence differently to see if this helps eliminate a “to-be” verb. For example, instead of “The monster was in the dark tunnel creeping,” rearrange as “Down the dark tunnel crept the monster.”

3. **Change another word in the sentence into a verb**-For example, instead of “Charles Schulz was the creator of the Peanuts cartoon strip,” change the common noun *creator* to the verb *created* as in “Charles Schulz created the Peanuts cartoon strip.”

4. **Combine sentences**-Look at the sentences before and after the one with the “to-be” verb to see if one of them can combine with the “to-be” verb sentence and so eliminate the “to-be” verb. For example, instead of “The child was sad. The sensitive young person was feeling that way because of the news story about the death of the homeless man,” combine as “The news story about the death of the homeless man saddened the sensitive child.”