

Verb Salad Activity

“Verb salad” is a term I use when I find students are a bit messy with their verbage, especially regarding tense (present perfect, past perfect, past participle, future progressive, etc.). I also use the term when students have too many different verb tenses in the same sentence or over a few sentences (the result is a confused audience trying to put together a timeline or debating the rules of time travel in your compositional universe). Furthermore, the verbs you use should say what you want them to say as specifically as possible; this means that you’ll want to use strong, specific verbs (like “accomplish” and “drive”), rather than weak and non-specific verbs (like “do” or “go”). Finally, “to be” verbs like “is” and “was” are generally, though not always, weaker than other more descriptive verbs you can use, or other ways of arranging the sentence. To avoid verb salad, there are five steps to follow when using verbs in sentences:

1. Think about **who is/was/will be doing** the verb, as well as **when** the verb is taking place:
 - a. the verb might have happened in the past but only once, happened in the past repeatedly or over a long period of time, is happening now and will continue to happen, happened just now, is a constant state of being, will happen in the future at one point, or will happen in the future repeatedly or over a long period of time.
2. Do your best to keep your writing concise while considering which tense is accurate
3. Look back at the verbs you’ve used and ask yourself—are there stronger words that could more specifically convey exactly what I would like to say?
4. Look back and ask yourself—have I used too many different verb tenses in this sentence/two sentences/paragraph?
5. Look back and ask yourself—can I eliminate any of the “to be” verbs for a stronger construction?

The best sentences will have strong and specific verbage with one or two different verb tenses only (preferably one), and will keep the language concise, yet accurate with how things happen(ed)/will happen for the verb. Let’s practice—with your partner, work through the following sentences and try to clear up the verb salad. Keep in mind that even if you make the sentence stronger by changing something, you might be able to make it even stronger, so look for different ways to rearrange the sentence.

- You should be asking her for help.
- The pie is delicious.
- The skyscraper was awesome.
- She is sad that the kids can’t play together anymore.
- The child was sad. The sensitive child was feeling that way because of the news story.
- It is believed by the teachers that students should be required to pass in order to go to the next grade.
- While Mitt Romney was running for President, sales of hair tonic had sky-rocketed in a way that had not been heard of since the Nixon administration.
- Charles Schulz was the creator of the Peanuts cartoon strip.
- This play is inspiring to all those who struggle with depression.
- More than five hundred children were evacuated from the town by the firefighters and volunteers.

- The monster was in the dark tunnel creeping.
- What she wanted was a flashy new pair of shoes.
- We went about many mornings where he was refusing to do the cooking on his own. That was the one thing that I was working on that morning with him so I didn't stress about helping him with everything else.
- I was able to work as a care home administrative assistant. Through shadowing these assistants, I was provided insights into the world of work and how the ICT operates in large bodies. My placement at this hospital is the one thing that helped me the most. I am now able to work under pressure and adapt to changing environments.