

Expletives

Marked as “Ex”

An expletive has no meaning of its own and, in a sentence, fills the slot of another word, phrase, or clause, **adding unnecessary words**. An expletive is also called a “dummy subject.” The most common expletives are any tense of “it is” and “there is.”

Identifying Expletives

The following are some common examples of expletives in business writing:

1. It is because of low employee morale in the documentation department that you have hired our consulting firm.
2. In addition to the analysis of the problem, there are several recommendations that we make.
3. There will be improved relations between Keller and the management committee.

Because they delay the true subject of your sentence, expletives are not grammatically incorrect but are weak in style. Many writers overuse expletives, causing documents to be wordy and, in some cases, unclear.

Fixing Expletives

In this section, the examples listed above are corrected to eliminate the expletives:

Example: It is because of low employee morale in the documentation department that you hired our consulting firm. [subject delayed]

Corrected: You hired our consulting firm because of low employee morale in the documentation department. [subject up front]

Example: In addition to the analysis of the problem, there are several recommendations that we make.

Corrected: In addition to the analysis of the problem, we make several recommendations.

Example: There will be improved relations between Keller and the management committee.

Corrected: Relations will improve between Keller and the management committee.

[In both of the examples above, the sentences are wordier than necessary with the expletive included.]

Please note: Occasionally, “it is” begins a sentence but is not an expletive construction. A writer might intend the “it” to refer to a noun in the previous sentence. In that case, the use of “it is” is not an expletive but, rather, a correct pronoun reference.

For more information on Expletives, see pp. 207 and 113 of the *Business Writer’s Handbook*.