



Weak Beginnings:


THE EXPLETIVES *THERE* AND *IT*

- ▶ As an adverb, *there* refers to direction or location:
The owner of the property lives over there.
- ▶ However, when sentences begin with *there*, often the word is not an adverb. Instead, it is a grammatical expletive. *It has no meaning:*
There were many scholars who accepted the earlier dating of the manuscript.
What does *there* mean in the sentence?

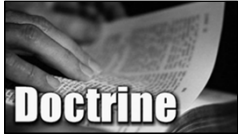
- ▶ Getting rid of *there* in this sentence is easy.
There were many scholars who accepted the earlier dating of the manuscript.
- ▶ Just cross out *there*, the verb *were*, and the pronoun *who* (*which* or *that*). What is left is a better sentence.
Many scholars accepted the earlier dating of the manuscript.
- ▶ You will discover that you may use this same technique for many sentences that begin with *there*.

Leave out a few words!

- ▶ Other sentences, however, may require more than just leaving out a few words:
There is no clear textual basis in the Bible for the doctrine of purgatory.
You may cross out *there is*, but you have no *who*, *which*, or *that* to omit, and neither do you have a verb. Instead, you will need to rewrite the sentence, giving it a new subject and verb.



- ▶ For instance, consider the following two rewrites of the sentence *There is no clear textual basis in the Bible for the doctrine of purgatory.*
The Bible has no clear textual basis for the doctrine of purgatory.
The doctrine of purgatory has no clear textual basis in the Bible.



- ▶ Unfortunately, writers often correct *there is/are* by using *the* verb *exist*:

There are several techniques to attract the reader's attention in an essay.

Overused—Many techniques exist to attract the reader's attention in an essay.

- ▶ Instead, identify who is using the techniques and use that person as the subject:

A writer may use several techniques to attract a reader's attention in an essay.

- ▶ The word *it* also may be an expletive. If *it* has no antecedent, it is an expletive:

During the winter storm, the highway patrol issued a travel advisory. It is extremely difficult to drive a car on icy roads.

- ▶ *It* in the second sentence has no antecedent—a word to which it refers. To correct the sentence, find the true subject. Ask yourself, "What is extremely difficult?"



- ▶ The answer is the infinitive phrase *to drive a car on icy roads*.
- ▶ Chase *to drive* to *driving* and rewrite the sentence as follows:
Driving a car on icy roads is extremely difficult.

- ▶ Using the expletives *it* and *there* becomes a crutch in writing. They become the default way of beginning a sentence or clause. The result is a weak and wordy way of beginning.

- ▶ Please search for *it* and *there* in your papers and make sure they belong there.
- ▶ Although the expletives *it* and *there* are not bad four-letter words, they are bad for your writing.



The Write Stuff