Weak Beginnings:
THE EXPLETIVES THERE AND IT

As a 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
document 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
document 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.