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Why should you avoid expletive constructions? Not because they're swears!

Despite their name, expletive constructions aren't swears—not in the grammatical sense, anyway! The word *expletive* suggests something that “fills in” a sentence, but isn't necessary. Profanities, as well as words like *do* in “Please do fill out that paperwork” are expletives. Here, however, we're referring to constructions using syntactic expletives. These are words like *there is*, *there were*, *it is*, and *it was* used to introduce the subject of the sentence—which is where the real meaning begins. The subject is then followed by a determinative such as *who* or *that*. Although they serve a grammatical function, expletive constructions are clutter that rob a sentence of clarity and vigor. Here are two examples:

- **It was** Malala Yousafzai **who** won the Nobel Peace Prize.
- **There are** two new studies **that** suggest that vaping is harmful.

Notice how much more energetic these sentences are when the expletive construction is removed:

- Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Peace Prize.
- Two new studies suggest that vaping is harmful.

Occasionally, an expletive construction can be useful to clarify, as in, “It was France, not Croatia, that won the World Cup.” But if clarification isn't required, skip the expletive construction and get right to the subject of the sentence.