



Composed v. Comprised

Composed and *comprised* basically mean the same thing (“to be made of,” “to consist of”). They’re often used interchangeably, although grammar sticklers often insist that they shouldn’t be. “Never use *to be comprised of*,” instructs the [CDC Style Guide](#) (which was last updated in 2003). In 2017, no less an authority than [Writing Tip Wednesday](#) exclaimed, “*Is comprised of* is never correct!” The [Chicago Manual of Style](#), CDC’s main style guide of the moment, agrees:

“comprise; compose. Use with care. To *comprise* is “to consist of, to include” {the whole comprises the parts}. To *compose* is “to make up, to form the substance of something” {the parts compose the whole}. The phrase *is comprised of*, though increasingly common, remains nonstandard. Instead, try *is composed of* or *consists of*.”

However, two important sources have a less strict stance on *comprised of*. [Grammarly](#) suspects that it’s slowly becoming standard usage. [Merriam-Webster](#) (MW) says, “although it has been in use since the late 18th century, [it] is still attacked as wrong. Why it has been singled out is not clear.” MW, however, still advises avoiding *comprised of* if you don’t want to be harassed by the grammar police.

Both of the following examples are grammatically correct:

The United States **comprises** 50 states.

The United States **is composed of** 50 states.

But we here at Writing Tip Wednesday are going to go out on a limb: Neither of them is the best choice. If writing like you talk is a goal of [clear communication](#) (and it is), the above sentences do not fit the bill. We suggest avoiding the issue altogether and reaching for a simpler word. “The United States **has** 50 states” does the job perfectly well.