

Energizing Our Action Verbs

Action verbs are the *doing* words of a sentence. They tell us what happens to or with the subject of the sentence. Here are some simple examples of action verbs:

- The car zoomed into the tunnel.
- In the final inning, Pedro knocked a grand slam.
- I adore chocolate!
- The students are entering the building.

If we energize our verbs, we help our readers vividly “see” what we are writing about. Read these two passages. Notice the differences in the verbs.

DEAD VERBS The final five seconds were on the score board as Chris ran down the court, bouncing the ball. Ten feet away from the hoop and a split second left on the clock, Chris jumped through the air and put the ball into the net. The bell rang, making the crowd go into hysteria.

INVIGORATING VERBS The final five seconds screamed from the score board as Chris bounded down the court, thrashing the floor with the ball. Ten feet away from the hoop and a split second left on the clock, Chris soared through the air, slamming the ball through the net. The bell buzzed, electrifying the crowd into hysteria.

As class, discuss how verb choice changes the way we read the two passages above. What is the difference between “dead” verbs and “invigorating” verbs? How does our choice of verbs affect the way the reader “sees” our writing? Why is this important to think about as a writer?

DIRECTIONS ▶ Now look at the paragraph below. Insert verbs that energize the piece.

I _____ out my front door, afraid I was late for school. Outside, the rain _____ onto the concrete as I _____ towards the subway. Finally below ground, the train _____ into the station. “Step aside!” the conductor _____, but no one _____. People _____ and _____ until they were in a car. When the doors finally _____, the train _____ the station and I realized it was Saturday.

After completing the exercise above, ask students to share and compare their verb choices in pairs or small groups. Have them choose the verbs they think are the most “invigorating.”

As a whole class, read the paragraph through together with students offering different invigorating verbs. Discuss which verbs work the best and why.