

Energize Business Writing With Action Verbs

Effective Writers Choose Dynamic and Results-Oriented Verbs

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Choose Action Verbs to Give Readers a Dynamic Ride - *Carol Cram*

Effective business writers choose action verbs to relay their message clearly, and to encourage readers to take a required action.

Action verbs give sentences their purpose and promote clarity. Effective writers use action verbs to express an action of the body or the mind. Business-related examples include verbs such as develop, investigate, understand, guarantee, and expand.

A [list of great action verbs](#) provides the writer with a valuable resource.

Use of Linking Verbs

Instead of action verbs many people, particularly when writing business messages, overuse linking verbs. A linking verb is some form of the verb to be. Examples include is, are, was, were, and will be. Linking verbs merely present a state of being.

For example, the sentence *The crowd is large* describes the characteristics of the crowd, but does not give the reader a clear picture regarding possible actions. Here is an action verb version: *A large crowd surged forward to purchase copies of the new bestseller.*

In the action verb version, the reader receives a clear picture of the situation. The verb *surged* is much more dynamic than the linking verb *is*. In the action verb sentence, the crowd actually does something. It surges forward to purchase a bestseller. The reader can draw specific conclusions from the sentence, particularly if the reader is the person who wrote the bestseller.

Using Action Verbs

Writing with linking verbs requires much less thought than writing with action verbs. However, writing that uses action verbs generally requires fewer words and packs far more punch. Following are more comparisons between Action Verb Sentences and Linking Verb Sentences:

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- Linking Verb Sentence: Mary's kindness was much appreciated by all her colleagues.
- Action Verb Sentence: Mary's colleagues appreciated her kindness.

In this example, the action verb version requires fewer words and places the emphasis on the actors (Mary's colleagues) who are doing the appreciating—which is the point of the sentence.

Here is another comparison:

- Linking Verb Sentence: A work team was put in place by George and Hilda.
- Action Verb Sentence: George and Hilda formed a team to tackle the client's concerns with the Carter account.

In this example, the action verb version requires more words; however, the words convey a much stronger and more useful message. The reader learns why George and Hilda formed a team and can act accordingly. For example, the reader of the action verb version may wish to become a part of the team because of connections to the Carter account.

Action Verbs and Efficiency

Use of action verbs contributes to efficiency. A comparison between action and linking verbs resembles the comparison between standing up and waving for a taxi and sitting quietly by the side of the road, hoping the taxi will stop.

Which situation yields the required result?

Focusing on the Message

To increase the use of action verbs, the writer needs to focus on exactly what message he or she wishes to convey. Instead of a lazy sentence such as *The meeting is cancelled*, the writer can communicate more meaningful information: *The Planning Committee rescheduled the March 5 meeting for March 9th at 10 am in the boardroom*. The reader knows exactly what action is expected and does not need to waste time sending emails to ask for clarification.

The successful business writer clarifies meaning at every opportunity and **never** writes two emails when one email can contain all the required information.

Tips for an Action Verb Orientation

Following are tips to develop an action verb orientation:

- Develop a list of common action verbs to substitute for linking verbs
- Strive to include action verbs 80% of the time in all business communications
- Focus on what the reader should do as a result of reading the message
- Identify specific, action-oriented tasks and use action verbs to communicate the information readers need to take the required action
- Create a picture for the reader instead of merely showing a state of being.

A consistent use of action verbs gives writing energy. Readers want to read clear, action-oriented messages that provide them with useful information and do not waste their time.

See also [Focus on Reader Actions](#) to learn techniques that effective business writers use to inspire appropriate reader action.

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