

STRONGER WRITING THROUGH STRONG VERBS

A **verb** is a word that shows action or expresses a state of being.

There are three kinds of verbs:

- 1) **Action verbs** show the subject performing an action, either physical or mental (run, jump, swim, eat, sleep, dancing, etc.)
- 2) **Auxiliary verbs**, also called helping verbs, are used to form tenses. Auxiliary verbs help a main verb. Example: Amanda *had* danced her heart out. – *danced* is the main verb (an action verb) which is helped by *had*.

AUXILIARY VERBS

is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been, do, does, did, have, has, had, can, may, will, shall, could, would, should, might, must

- 3) **Linking verbs** connect the subject to a noun (the direct object) or an adjective in the predicate. A linking verb describes a state of being. They simply tell us how someone or something is (or tastes, feels, looks, etc.) Many linking verbs are also used as auxiliary verbs. Linking verbs do not show action and cannot stand alone. Avoid using too many linking verbs in your writing as they are not very descriptive. Linking verbs are sometimes referred to as "to be" verbs because they describe a state of being rather than describe an action. Example: Amanda *is* a dancer. – *is* links the subject (Amanda) to the noun/direct object (dancer). John *was* happy when he passed his driver's test. – the verb *was* links the subject (John) to the adjective that describes John (happy).

LINKING VERBS (a few of the most common)

is, am, are, was, were, be, been, smell, seem, become, appear, sound, taste, feel, remain, stay, look, turn, get

Hints for identifying verbs:

- You can tell that a word is a verb if you can change the tense:
I *verbed* yesterday. (past tense)
I *am verbing* right now. (present tense)
I *will verb* tomorrow. (future tense)

Let's use the action verb "play" as an example:

I *played* yesterday. (past tense)
I *am playing* right now. (present tense)
I *will play* tomorrow. (future tense)

- When you are unsure what part of speech a word is, the letters at the end of the word can sometimes help you figure it out:

COMMON ACTION VERB ENDINGS

-ate

-ize

-ify

ACTIVE VOICE VS. PASSIVE VOICE

The relationship between the subject and the verb determines the voice of a sentence. There are two different ways a sentence can be written:

1. When a sentence is in **active voice**, the subject comes before the verb. In active voice, the subject does the action of the sentence.

Example: S V
Everyone at the party had fun.

Example: S V
Molly cashed her check at the bank.

2. When a sentence is in **passive voice**, the subject of the sentence is acted upon by some other agent. Passive voice often includes auxiliary verbs.

Example: V V S
Fun was had by everyone at the party.

Example: S V V
The check was cashed by Molly.

Rule: In academic essays, a writer should try to **use active voice** and **avoid using passive voice**.

TRANSFORMING PASSIVE SENTENCES TO ACTIVE SENTENCES:

Let's use the following example sentence to illustrate the process of changing a passive sentence to an active one: The ice cream cones were eaten by the children.

You'll notice in the above sentence that the agent doing the action (the children) is not the subject of the sentence. Also, the sentence uses an auxiliary verb (were). These two clues tell you that the sentence is written in passive voice.

STEP 1: Make the agent doing the action the subject of the sentence.

PASSIVE: The ice cream cones were eaten **by the children**.

ACTIVE: **The children**...

STEP 2: Remove the auxiliary verb (to be verb) from the sentence. Change the past participle into the appropriate tense.

PASSIVE: The ice cream cones **were eaten** by the children.

ACTIVE: The children **ate**...

STEP 3: Make the subject of the passive sentence the receiver of the action to complete the change.

PASSIVE: **The ice cream cones** were eaten by the children.

ACTIVE: The children ate **the ice cream cones**.

CAUTION:

Avoid shifting from active to passive voice in the same sentence because it can cause awkwardness and confusion.

Incorrect: The children ate ice cream, but it was bought by Peter. (voice shifts)

Correct: The children ate ice cream, but Peter bought it. (voice consistent)