

Verb Usage

A verb is a word, or group of words, which indicates an *action* or a *state of being*. **Every sentence must have a verb**. A technical knowledge of verbs will help you achieve greater clarity and energy in your prose.

Tenses: Verbs dictate the tense (past, present or future) of a sentence:

- PAST: Yesterday he *played* the guitar.
- PRESENT: Now he *is playing* the drums.
- FUTURE: Tomorrow he *will play* the violin.

Subject and Verb: All sentences have a subject and a verb. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular. If the **subject** is plural, the verb must be plural. **Subject** and *verb* must agree:

- Singular = **The boy** *is playing* the banjo.
- Plural = **The boys** *are playing* the banjos.

We need to know how to ‘conjugate’ (give the different forms of) a verb, so that endings agree with the subject:

- 1st Person singular = I
- 2nd person singular = you (one)
- 3rd person singular = he, she, it
- 1st person plural = we
- 2nd person plural = you (more than one)
- 3rd person plural = they

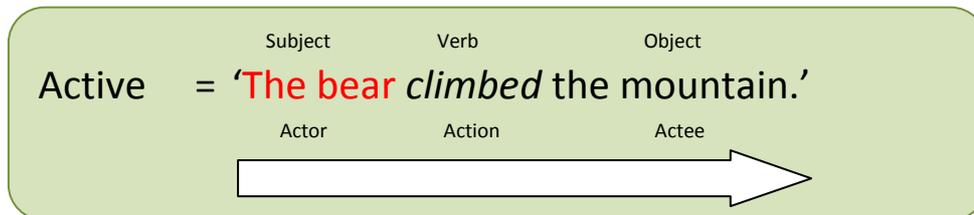
So....

- ‘**Jenny and Lisa** *were playing* together.’
- ‘A **flock of birds** *is flying* over.’

Active and Passive Verbs

Verbs have two forms. These are known as voices:

- The **active voice** prioritises the **subject**, indicating the action performed by the subject:



Because of the active voice the sentence reads clearly and creates a positive verbal momentum. The action flows from left to right.

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- The **passive voice** reverses this order, indicating the action performed on the subject:



The action flows from right to left. By placing the 'Actee' before the 'Actor', the sentence loses momentum and the reader must work harder.

By limiting the passive verbs we can create forward verbal momentum in our prose. This increases the energy of our writing and improves the flow of our argument. **Overuse of the passive will drain the energy out of your writing.**

So – where possible – keep the verbs active by prioritising the subject and maintaining the energy of your writing.

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