

Term: “Active verbs”

Definition: Verbs, not adjectives (though often relied upon by novice writers) drive all sentences; to improve clarity and concision, we must teach active verbs. Students select generic all-purpose verbs such as “deal with” or “show,” which quickly become meaningless and repetitive and convey no analytical meaning.

“Said” becomes more descriptive as “hypothesized” and when “shows” becomes “represents” the reader is able to make more – and more specific – meaning.

For the reader, “Cheswick dealt with” or “Figure 4 shows” are far less meaningful than “Cheswick hypothesized” or “Figure 4 represents.” As always, you should choose exact words in favor of nonspecific ones, especially when you can use an active verb.

Please note that the use of active verbs often implies active voice although this is not always true.

Example

“This work generalizes Smith’s earlier algorithm.”

“This approach improves Smith’s design.”

“Tom cleans the house.”

Non-Example

“This work **is a** generalization of Smith’s earlier algorithm”

“This approach **is an** improvement on Smith’s design,”

“The house is cleaned by Tom.”

Links to Resources

<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/grammar-and-syntax/active-and-passive-verbs/>