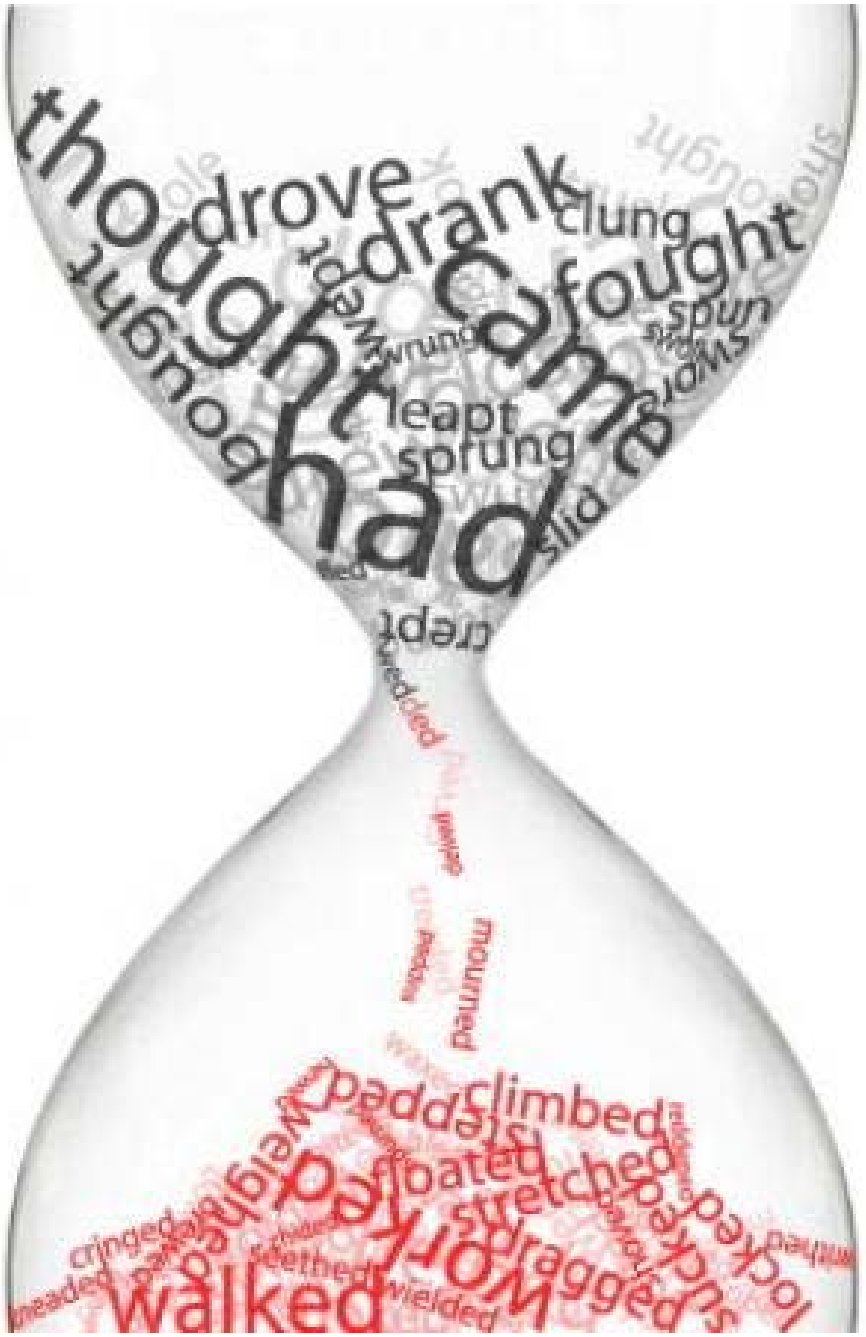
Activate your VERBS!



QuickWrite (5 minutes): Write 1/2 page about anything--you must stick to one topic--without using any of these words:

- any form of the word **be**, **(am, is are, was, were)**
- any form of the word **go**, **(went, gone, going)**
- any form of the word **have**, **(has, had, having)**
- any form of the word **get, (got, getting, gotten)**
- any form of the word **do**, **(did, done, etc.)**

One problem beginning writers share comes from using linking verbs instead of action verbs. Often, they add clutter to your writing.

is

are

am

were

was

have

been

has

had

The motorcycles were sweeping into the park like 1000-pound bees. The lead rider was a huge man and was hunched over the handlebars. His face was behind a mirrored visor that was reflecting a miniature and distorted image of the road that was stretching before him.

This is a good piece of description, but it could be sharper. Concentrating on eliminating *was* and *were* structures, the writer revised it.

The motorcycles swept into the park like 1000-pound bees. The lead rider, a huge man, hunched over the handlebars. His face was hidden behind a mirrored visor that reflected a miniature and distorted image of the road stretching before him.

Whenever possible, use strong action verbs instead of a weak verb + adverb.

- *The student walked into the classroom and put her book on the desk.*
- *The student stomped into the classroom and slammed her book on the desk.*
- *The student glided into the classroom and flung her book on the desk.*

Now try this: Rewrite these sentences at least twice, showing the action of an inanimate object. We're assuming that these vehicles are not experiencing any particular emotion, but try to communicate a sense of their condition or purpose.

The station wagon rolled down the street.

The propellers on airplane turned and made noise.

Writing with strong acting verbs is not just good literary advice, it's good biological advice. No joke: recent studies indicate that there's a direct connection between reading action verbs and the brain's sensation of actually doing that action.

How do we know this? The brain's motor cortex is divided into segments that control the action of various muscles of the body. When those muscles flex, the corresponding part of the brain "lights up" (indicated by MRIs, or Magnetic Resonance Imaging). Likewise, parts of the cerebral cortex respond to language. What no one understood until recently is that the language and motor areas of the brain were directly connected. When a person reads an active verb, the part of the brain connected to that verb's action will respond--it's as if the reader's brain were experiencing that action. This may help to explain why reading an exciting passage in a book will make your heart pound and your breath get shorter. Neutral action verbs and linking verbs have no such MRI-stimulating power. (For more details, see the January 2004 issue of *Neuron* magazine.)

Exercise

Go, walk, run, jump, fly, move—these are fine English words, but they are very imprecise in that they do not describe exactly **how** a character or object relocates itself in space. Of course, the best word choice depends on who or what is moving and under what conditions.

Example: An elephant *lumbers* when he moves, while a mouse *scurries.*

For each suggestion below, choose a verb that means the same as **GO, WALK, RUN, JUMP, FLY, or MOVE**, but is more precise in describing *how* the object relocates itself in space. Avoid the obvious word. Use an answer only once.

Then share your answers with your classmates. See how many verbs you wrote that no one else chose.

Hot fudge . . .

An angry teenager . . .

A sky diver . . .

A wild horse . . .

A snake . . .

Tired hikers . . .

An army tank . . .

A kite . . .

A speeding bullet . . .

A penguin . . .

Snowflakes . . .

Toes . . .

A sleepy toddler . . .

A brass band . . .

An ice skater . . .

A comet . . .

An ocean storm . . .

A stream . . .