



DeYoung Consulting Services

Helping People Learn up to Their Potential

Do you remember the last time you sat through a dull presentation and how hard it was to pay attention? Passive writing can cause the same type of mental lethargy. Instead of letting your readers zone out while reading your report, jazz up your piece by eliminating passive writing and infusing it with more active words.

Eliminating passive writing

In an active sentence the subject is acting. In a passive sentence the subject is being acted upon. Notice the difference in the following sentences.

The club elected Tom president. In this active sentence the club members are acting.

Tom was elected president of the club. In this case the club is still acting, but the focus is on Tom who is the object of the action.

Generally, you want the subject of your sentence to act as in the first example. But if you don't want the subject of your sentence to be the focus, try rewriting it.

The second example above could be rewritten like this: *Tom is president-elect of the club.* In this case Tom is both the focus and the subject of the sentence.

You don't need to rid your writing of all passive sentences. In fact, there are times when it's nearly impossible to write a sentence in the active form. But by eliminating some passive wording you'll keep your reader more engaged.

Pepping up your writing

Here are a few other tips for invigorating your writing and drawing in your readers.

- Try to eliminate the helping verbs in your sentences. Take a red pen to your writing and circle the following: *be, been, am, is, are, was* and *were*. Then try to rewrite each sentence without them. Your writing will be shorter and livelier.
- Use the “find” function on your computer to search for key words you’ve repeated. Then replace all but a few with a synonym. To help with the process buy a good thesaurus or use Merriam-Webster OnLine at www.webster.com.
- Start a list of high-energy or descriptive words you can use. Advertisements are a great source for short, energetic words.

If you need further help invigorating your curriculum or other written materials, give me a call. I can add some zip to keep your audience reading.

Karen DeYoung is principal of DeYoung Consulting Services, which provides quality learning experiences for individuals and groups. We develop training materials and activities that advance individual, team, and organizational learning. Our work is done with integrity, reliability, and accountability.

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