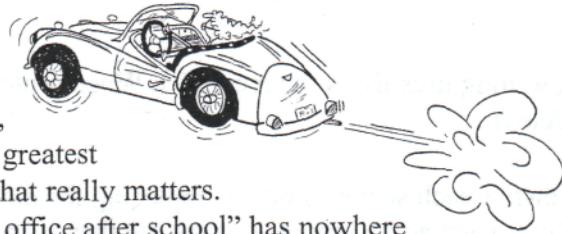


Five Hundred Horsepower Verbs



Verbs are to sentences what engines are to cars—they drive them, energize them and pull them along, sometimes at breakneck speed. But speed is not the greatest measure of a verb; it is the power a verb generates that really matters.

For example, a sentence like “She *went* into the office after school” has nowhere near the impact of “She *sneaked* into the office after school.” The word *went* is a one horsepower verb, while the verb *sneaked* generates a good five hundred horsepower. It pulls us into the sentence by our eyeballs. We can *see* the girl nervously managing the door, looking over her shoulder, sliding carefully yet quickly over the threshold into the office—all with one verb: *sneaked*.

◆ Read the sentences below and circle the verbs that energize each sentence. If more than one verb moves a particular sentence, circle both verbs.

1. Melanie weaseled her way into my heart, and later I cursed myself for letting her in.
2. As he kneaded the bread, he wished it were Harry’s face there on the counter, in a convenient, doughy lump.
3. She pounded the desk with a frozen fish and demanded complete silence in the room.
4. Doug snapped the head off a match with his thumbnail and stuck the flame into a pile of dry grass.
5. Nobody peered into the crystal ball without Ursula’s permission.
6. Lenny snickered as Angela tiptoed into the room.
7. Antonio hurled the chocolate éclair across the room, and it plopped into the fish tank.
8. Marcy spit out her words like watermelon seeds, one at a time, straight at the prosecuting attorney.

◆ Now write five sentences of your own with verbs that energize them. Circle the verbs in each sentence.



Verbs Alive

Good writing uses lively, active verbs. When sentences are dull, it is usually because the verbs are lifeless.

- ◆ Rewrite each sentence below, replacing the dull, ordinary verbs in italics with verbs that are alive. Then add a sentence, using another verb that is alive.

Example

Ordinary: The wolf *came* to the door and *said*, "Let me in, or I'll *disturb* your house."

Alive: The wolf *crept* to the door and *sarled*, "Let me in, or I'll *demolish* your house!"

1. Philip *said*, "I love you, Elizabeth! Really!"

2. Louise glanced at the fruitcake and gasped, "Rashad, you've *made* a multi-fruited masterpiece!"

3. Harold opened his jaws wide and *bit* off 12 square inches of pineapple pizza.

4. The beauty queen *walked* up to the judges and slammed her crown on the table.

5. Paula *removed* her mittens and threw them into the fire.

6. Walter *walked* into the bedroom and fell flat on his face.

7. The pigeon *sat* on the dead branch, mourning the loss of his friend Earl.
