

Writing Tip: Avoid Hidden Verbs

Adapted from *Writing to Get Things Done*® seminar

The purpose of business writing is to take care of business. Business writing is about getting things done—solving problems, meeting important deadlines, and keeping projects on target. When business professionals, especially senior management teams, remember this function of writing, everyone within an organization becomes more productive. Not only will senior managers increase their productivity, but their team members will as well.



Stan Berry

Writers can help their readers get things done by keeping their language simple and easy to read. One way of doing this is to use the verb form of a word rather than its noun form.

Grammatical Definitions

Remember from grammar school, a noun is a word that names people, places and things. Examples: Bob, chemistry lab, report. A verb is an action word. Verbs tell what the noun is doing. Verbs drive the action of the sentence. Sentences with simple verbs are clear, powerful, and memorable.

Examples

The following *study was undertaken* to develop a working basis for the restructuring of the Trust Department filing system.

This report *outlines our plans for improving* the Trust Department filing system.

Quality Control *began an investigation* to learn the root causes of the cracked inserts.

Quality Control *investigated* four possible causes of the cracked inserts.

Avoid Hidden Verbs

Avoiding hidden verbs, where a writer hides the verb in the noun, is a simple way to reduce sentence clutter and make for easy reading.

Rather than using these hidden verb forms:

For improved risk reduction
For property protection
To provide authorization
Present a report
Make a list
Perform an examination of
Bring to a conclusion
Give an indication of
Make adjustments to
A study was undertaken

Use these simple verbs:

To reduce risk
To protect property
Authorize
Report
List
Examine
Conclude
Indicate
Adjust
Study

Before You Hit the Send Button

Writers sometimes use hidden verbs to give their writing a more formal, academic tone. These writers fear that simple language reflects a simple, uneducated, mind. But simple verbs clearly answer the most important question readers want answered upfront: “What do you want me do?”



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