

USE LIVELY VERBS

by Beulah Wood

Someone told you once to use lively verbs, and you agreed. But you find it hard to remember, you are not sure it is worth the effort, and you do not know quite how to do it. Join the club. Many of us have felt like this.

While teaching a writers' class in Turkey, I suddenly had an inspiration on how to help the class "see and feel" the difference. I told the people to practice brightening their verbs by writing *passive* scenes, *adjectival passive* scenes, and *active* scenes. The new idea after that was to then write *interactive* scenes. It worked!

The class began with static verbs like *is*, *are*, *were*, *was*, *be* and *being*. Then, the students spiced up their writing with adjectives. Their pieces improved much more on the third round with active verbs. Then, the students made a character *do* something in the scene, interacting with their environment. The students enjoyed the technique, excitedly making changes.

Here are two illustrations with examples of the four ways of writing. I hope you will be as delighted with the difference as the class in Turkey.

Passive scene: The grapes were purple. Most were hidden under the leaves. Branches were resting on granite posts.

Passive scene with adjectives: The grapes were purple and juicy. Most were hidden under the large green leaves that covered the thick branches resting on sturdy granite posts.

Active scene: Large green leaves spread over the granite posts that supported the thick branches. Purple grapes dangled almost out of sight.

Interactive scene: Sniffing the heavy scent of ripening grapes, I bent my head to pass under the branches and leaves on their granite post. I reached out, plucked two purple grapes, and popped them in my mouth, savoring the sharp, sweet fruit. Yumm!

Passive scene: There was a dusty road. There were bicycles, lorries, bullock carts, and barrows of tomatoes. Behind the shops were trees and in front were people waiting for a bus.

Passive scene with adjectives and adverb: There was a narrow dusty road. Slowly passing were black bicycles, large lorries, ponderous bullock carts, and barrows full of tomatoes. Behind the grubby shops were green trees and in front villagers were waiting for a bus.

Active scene: Cyclists, stirring the dust, dodged barrows of tomatoes as lorries thundered down the center of the road. Bullock carts crunched towards the shops that huddled under the trees, while villagers loitered at the bus stop.

Interactive scene: Hoping nobody would notice, Satish slipped past a bicycle and behind a lorry, then blended into the shadows of trees and bystanders. He shuffled along the shop fronts, fixing his eyes on the back of the tomato seller until he could sweep eight tomatoes into his bag. Then he ambled on in the dust behind a bullock cart.

Interactive writing is as different as seeing a video after a still photo. Give it a try!❖

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