

FLESH-AND-BLOOD CHARACTERS

Two of the most important elements of writing with clarity—and the keys to active voice—are **subjects** and **verbs**. Readers need both “**flesh-and-blood characters**” (subjects) and “**actions**” (verbs) in order to understand sentences clearly, but of the two elements, **they need good characters more**. Without a character, a sentence can have no real action, and without action, a sentence can’t really be an active sentence!

Creating “flesh-and-blood characters” is a vital part of writing in active voice.

WRITING FLESH-AND-BLOOD CHARACTERS

1. Find the main character in the sentence.

- a. *If you can’t find it right away, underline the first seven to eight words in the sentence; you can most likely locate it there:*
 - i. The decision that the congregation made was to stop the crows from nesting in the church’s bell tower.
- b. *Determine what word or phrase in this section of the sentence is doing the action:*
 - i. The **decision** that the congregation made..... Congregation → **made [decision]**
- c. *Focus the sentence on the doer of the action (the character) first. Put the character and action as close to the beginning of the sentence — **and as close together** — as possible:*
 - i. The congregation **decided** to stop the crows from nesting in the church’s bell tower.
- d. *Sometimes the characters are easy to spot; other times, they will be an object of a preposition, implied, or connected to a nominalization (which happens when a writer turns a verb into a noun):*
 - i. Distraction from technology in the classroom often leads to poor student performance.
 - ii. **Distraction** from technology..... Technology → **distracts**

2. If the main character is missing, construct one.

- a. *A writer can do this by repurposing a word or phrase not previously used as a subject, or creating a character through a relevant abstraction.*
 - i. The ballgame **was canceled** due to inclement weather. → Town officials **canceled** the ballgame due to inclement weather.

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