FLESH-AND-BLOOD CHARACTERS

Two of the most important elements of writing with clarity—and the keys to active voice—are **subject**s 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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