

Moving verbs



On the lookout...

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

How can a phrase with so many letters of the alphabet also be so dull? It's a surprise that the fox didn't fall asleep half-way through that sentence and come crashing down on the lethargic mongrel. Instead of rolling out boring words like 'walk' and 'run,' give your characters an early birthday present and spice up their motions with these verbs.

Advance

Bolt

Bound

Burst

Bus

Bust

Bustle

Charge

Clamber

Climb

Crash

Dash

Depart

Deviate

Escort

Explore

Extend

Fly

Gravitate

Hobble

Hurry

Journey

Launch

Lead

Leap

Lurch

Mount

Plunge

Race

Retreat

Revolve

Rise

Rush

Saunter

Scamper

Skip

Skulk

Slide

Slink

Slip

Sneak

Soar

Spurt

Storm

Stroll

Stumble

Surge

Tail

Toddle

Travel

Trip

Trudge

Usher

Weave

Wind

Handling verbs



"She gripped the colored pencil"

Don't have your protagonist 'hold' something or 'put' it down — that tells us nothing about the character, object, or the action. Here are some sweet alternate verbs that will pull readers into your scene about a guy with a thing in his hand:

Amend

Capture

Catch

Clasp

Clutch

Coddle

Dangle

Deposit

Drag

Drop

Ensnare

Envelop

Expose

Extract

Fling

Fondle

Fuse

Grasp

Grip

Grope

Intertwine

Peck

Pilot

Place

Pluck

Prune

Remove

Scrape

Scratch

Scrawl

Seize

Serve

Snag

Sprinkle

Steal

Steer

Strain

Stretch

Swipe

Trim

Uncover

Unpick

Untangle

Wield

Wrench

Wrest

Wring

Yank

Speaking verbs



"Which way to the library?" shrieked the dinosaur.

Buckle up: you're about to get some advice that sounds contradictory, but really isn't. The widely held rule about writing dialogue is that you [shouldn't use dialogue tags more exotic than "he said," and "she said."](#) And that is true. If you tell your readers that [Doctor Watson ejaculated](#) in surprise, you're more likely to distract your readers than if you wrote: "My word, Holmes. What a shock!" Watson said.

But, while keeping your dialogue tags unobtrusive, you don't have to describe all acts of speech as "saying." Here are some strong alternate verbs for characters who are flapping their lips:

Advise

Amplify

Assert

Bellow

Blab

Brief

Broadcast

Bubble

Command

Croon

Crow

Gab

Garble

Gloat

Groan

Growl

Gush

Impart

Instruct

Mimic

Moan

Muse

Notify

Recite

Report

Roar

Shriek

Snarl

Snipe

Tattle

Wail

Attacking verbs



Mac blasted his opponent with an overhand punch.

Verbs maketh the action, and nowhere is this truer than in action scenes. There's no easier way to ruin a fight than by using the first, boring words that come to mind.

Arnold hit the other robot powerfully, who then used his .44 Magnum to shoot him back.

Boo. Hiss. Snooze. In action scenes, your job as a writer is to excite the reader — and for that, you need to quicken the pace of your writing. No time for adjectives or adverbs that lengthen sentences. Pick verbs that evoke the movements, speed, and emotions that you're looking for. Start here:

Attack

Bash

Batter

Besiege

Blast

Bombard

Chip

Chop

Cleave

Collide

Crush

Demolish

Dismantle

Eradicate

Fight

Grapple

Hack

Lash

Quash

Raid

Ravage

Rip

Scorch

Shatter

Shock

Slash

Smash

Smite

Strike

Struggle

Tussle

Wallop

Wreck

Wrest

Wrestle

Zap

Zing

Sensing verbs

In films, a lot of storytelling is done through the close up: a wide shot of a rotting corpse cutting to a close-up of a grizzled detective squinting his eyes tells us that he's closely scrutinizing the body and wondering what happened. However, that's Cinema — and books are not a visual medium. Luckily, a well-deployed verb in context can imply how a character is reacting to something they're witnessing. So take a peek at these:

Behold

Detect

Discern

Discover

Eavesdrop

Eyeball

Gawk

Gaze

Glare

Glimpse

Heed

Inspect

Locate

Notice

Peek

Peer

Perceive

Picture

Pinpoint

Probe

Realize

Regard

Scan

Scrutinize

Spy

Survey

Standing verbs



She hovered near the entrance.

Sure, someone might be standing on the street — but what else are they doing? You don't have to tell us that they're playing on the phone or thinking about their vacation, but you can give us a better picture of how they're behaving with one of these actions:

Hold

Hover

Lean

Lurk

Park

Plant

Plop

Position

Rest

Settle

Slump

Eating verbs

The Duchess of Devonshire doesn't dine in the same way that a soldier in the trenches scoops from his mess tin. Pick the right verbs and you'll have your readers (and characters) eating out of your hand.

Chew

Devour

Gobble

Gorge

Inhale

Munch

Pick

Slurp

Swallow

Wolf

Transforming verbs

Describing what humans are doing is a lot easier than trying to communicate something that people have never seen before. How do you paint a word-picture of a cute alien who is transmogrifying into a deadly monster? And how can you explain to people what it's like being on the deck of an aircraft carrier, with its various moving parts? If you're not already shouting, "Verbs! Verbs!" then you haven't been paying attention.

Absorb

Alter

Atomize

Balloon

Demolish

Distend

Enlarge

Erase

Expand

Explode

Heighten

Intensify

Magnify

Melt

Modify

Multiply

Mushroom

Mutate

Puff

Refine

Revitalize

Revolutionize

Rust

Shrivel

Snowball

Supersize

Swell

Throb

Transfigure

Transform

Emoting verbs



So, it had come to this: paying his bills by crying for a stock photo.

“Show, don’t tell” was made for writing about emotion. If ever you feel the urge to write, “He was very sad,” then please power down your computer and take a nap. Nobody needs to read that. Instead of telling us how a character feels, show them doing something that reveals this emotion. Why not start by checking out these evocative verbs:

Beam

Brood

Covet

Crave

Faze

Fret

Frown

Glower

Howl

Scowl

Sob

Stare

Swoon

Wail

Yowl

Shining verbs

“Don’t tell me the moon is shining,” Chekhov once wrote. “Show me the glint of the light on broken glass.” As a tip of the great Russian dramatist and short story maestro, we’ll finish up with some more alternatives for shining.

Flicker

Gleam

Glisten

Glitter

Glow

Shimmer

Sizzle

Sparkle

Twinkle

Well-chosen, powerful verbs are the secret weapons in a wordsmith’s holster. Always remember that using a bog-standard, overused verb is a missed opportunity. Make every word count, and give your readers something they can get lost in.