

active and concrete verbs in legal writing

Active and Concrete Verbs in Legal Writing: Clarity, Precision, and Persuasion

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Keywords: active and concrete verbs in legal writing, legal writing style, legal clarity, concise legal writing, persuasive legal writing, strong verbs in legal writing, improving legal writing, effective legal communication

Publisher: The American Bar Association (ABA) Publishing. The ABA is a leading publisher of legal resources, known for its high standards of scholarship and its commitment to providing practical guidance to legal professionals.

Editor: Mr. David Chen, J.D., Mr. Chen is a seasoned legal editor with over 15 years of experience editing legal publications and working with leading legal scholars. He specializes in improving the clarity and effectiveness of legal writing.

Introduction:

The use of active and concrete verbs is paramount in legal writing. In a field demanding precision, clarity, and persuasive power, the choice of verbs significantly impacts the readability, understandability, and overall effectiveness of legal documents. This article examines the critical role of active and concrete verbs in legal writing, exploring both the challenges involved in their consistent implementation and the numerous opportunities they present for enhancing legal communication. Mastering the art of using active and concrete verbs in legal writing is not merely a stylistic choice; it's a fundamental skill that separates effective legal prose from muddled and ineffective writing.

H1: The Power of Active Voice in Legal Writing

Legal writing often suffers from passive voice construction, leading to ambiguity and weak arguments. Passive voice obscures the actor performing the action, weakening the impact of the statement. For example, "The contract was breached" is weaker than "The defendant breached the contract." The latter sentence is more direct, assigns responsibility clearly, and is consequently more persuasive. Active and concrete verbs in legal writing help to establish a clear subject-verb relationship, making the writing more concise and impactful. This clarity is especially crucial in legal documents where precise attribution and

accountability are paramount. Active voice instills confidence and authority, enhancing the overall credibility of the legal argument.

H2: Choosing Concrete Verbs: Precision and Impact

Beyond the active-passive distinction, the selection of concrete verbs is essential for achieving precision and impact in legal writing. Vague verbs like “said,” “did,” or “made” fail to convey the specific action undertaken. Instead, choosing more concrete verbs paints a vivid picture and strengthens the argument. For example, instead of “The witness made a statement,” consider “The witness testified,” or even more precisely, “The witness testified under oath that...” This level of detail is crucial in legal writing, ensuring that the reader has a clear and accurate understanding of the events described. Active and concrete verbs in legal writing, therefore, contribute to a more persuasive and compelling narrative.

H3: Challenges in Implementing Active and Concrete Verbs

Despite the benefits, implementing active and concrete verbs consistently presents several challenges. Legal writing often involves complex concepts and intricate relationships that can make it difficult to maintain a consistently active and concrete style. The ingrained habit of using passive voice, particularly in traditional legal training, can be hard to overcome. Moreover, the need for formality and precision in legal language might sometimes seem to conflict with the use of more concise and vigorous verbs. Finding the right balance between formality and concision requires careful consideration and a nuanced understanding of the specific context. The complexity of legal subject matter often necessitates longer sentences, which can inadvertently lead to passive constructions.

H4: Opportunities for Improvement through Active and Concrete Verbs

Despite the challenges, the opportunities presented by active and concrete verbs in legal writing are considerable. The enhanced clarity and precision achieved through this style lead to improved comprehension and reduced ambiguity. This translates into more efficient reading and processing of legal documents by judges, opposing counsel, and clients. Active and concrete verbs contribute significantly to creating a more persuasive and impactful legal argument. By replacing weak, passive verbs with strong, active counterparts, legal writers can significantly improve the overall effectiveness of their communication. The resultant increased clarity reduces the chances of misinterpretations, leading to more favorable outcomes.

H5: Practical Strategies for Effective Verb Choice

To effectively integrate active and concrete verbs in legal writing, several practical strategies can be employed. Firstly, regularly review and edit legal documents to identify and replace passive voice constructions with active ones. Secondly, consult a thesaurus to identify stronger, more precise alternatives to weak verbs. Thirdly, pay attention to the specific action being performed and choose a verb that accurately and vividly reflects that action. Finally, it is important to practice consistently. With consistent effort, legal writers can effectively incorporate active and concrete verbs into their writing style, resulting in clearer, more precise, and more persuasive legal arguments. The use of active and concrete verbs in legal writing is not just about style; it's about effectiveness and achieving

better results.

Conclusion:

The consistent use of active and concrete verbs in legal writing is not simply a matter of style; it is a crucial element of effective legal communication. While challenges exist in consistently implementing this style, especially in complex legal contexts, the significant opportunities for improved clarity, precision, and persuasiveness outweigh any difficulties. By consciously choosing strong verbs and adopting active voice constructions, legal writers can enhance the readability and impact of their work, ultimately leading to more successful outcomes in legal proceedings. Mastering the use of active and concrete verbs in legal writing is a key skill that every legal professional should strive to develop.

FAQs:

1. What is the difference between active and passive voice? Active voice emphasizes the subject performing the action (e.g., "The lawyer filed the motion"), while passive voice emphasizes the action itself, often omitting the actor (e.g., "The motion was filed").
1. Why is active voice preferred in legal writing? Active voice is clearer, more concise, and more direct, making it easier to understand and more persuasive.
1. How can I identify passive voice in my writing? Look for sentences with a form of the verb "to be" (is, are, was, were, been) followed by a past participle.
1. What are some examples of concrete verbs in legal writing? Instead of "made a statement," use "testified," "affirmed," or "alleged." Instead of "had a meeting," use "conferred," "negotiated," or "litigated."
1. How can I improve my use of active and concrete verbs? Regularly review and edit your work, using a thesaurus to find stronger verb alternatives and actively seeking out passive voice constructions to revise.
1. Does using active and concrete verbs make legal writing less formal? Not necessarily. Formal language can still be achieved while using strong, active verbs.

1. Are there exceptions where passive voice is acceptable in legal writing? Yes, sometimes passive voice is necessary for emphasis on the action rather than the actor, or to avoid assigning blame prematurely.
1. How does the use of active and concrete verbs impact the persuasiveness of legal arguments? Active and concrete verbs create a more direct and forceful presentation, increasing the impact and persuasiveness of arguments.
1. Can software tools help identify and correct passive voice? Yes, several grammar and style checkers can identify passive voice and suggest active alternatives.

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