Use Strong Verbs

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn that writers can use strong verbs to influence readers.
• Practice using strong verbs in persuasive text.
• Discuss how to apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Thesaurus for each student pair
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling and practice texts onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Using Strong Verbs

Say: When I write a persuasive letter, I want people to understand my views about something. I want to use powerful words to influence readers’ opinions. I want to use strong, active verbs to describe the facts and to make a case. Using strong, active verbs is more likely to hold readers’ attention. For example, I could write, “There is garbage all over the sidewalk.” But the sentence would carry more force if I wrote it like this: “The sidewalk overflows with garbage.” The second sentence avoids the use of the verb is and uses the active verb overflows instead. Today I’m going to show you how to include strong, active verbs in your persuasive letters.

Model How Writers Use Strong Verbs

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

My dad and I witnessed two teenagers throwing soft-drink cans into the lake. We saw a little kid drop his candy wrapper. A man and woman dumped a plastic bag of garbage under a tree.

Modeling Text

Ask students to listen as you read the passage aloud and to listen for strong verbs.

Say: The writer describes what she and her dad saw. She uses the word witnessed, which is a strong, active verb. She could have written, “My dad and I saw them,” but using the word witnessed, which refers to someone who can give a first-hand account, sounds more forceful and official. She uses other verbs to describe what she and her dad saw. The word dumped sounds much more forceful than the word left and creates a better picture in readers’ minds.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Strong Verbs in Writing

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

We can ask for help to make a better park. Or, we can just leave it alone.

Practice Text

Read the sentences aloud to students and point out the verbs. Suggest that the sentences would be more powerful if they contained more active, interesting verbs. Ask students to work with a partner to rewrite the sentences using strong verbs. Each pair of students should write down its sentences and be prepared to read them to the class and explain the word choices they made. Suggest that students use a thesaurus to find words that could replace the underlined verbs, e.g., request, demand, insist, urge, plea, create, fashion, form, construct, build, abandon, desert, and forsake.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together. Invite partners to read their sentences aloud and explain the word choices they made. Ask students to evaluate the sentences, saying which use verbs most effectively and why. Record the best examples and post these as models for students to use as they revise their own persuasive letters.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned how using strong, active verbs in persuasive letters is one way to make your writing more powerful. Remember, a good persuasive letter uses powerful words to influence the reader. As you write your persuasive letter, remember to use strong verbs to make your case.

Encourage students to use strong, active verbs during independent writing time, as appropriate. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share examples of strong, active verbs they used in their persuasive letters.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Work one on one with beginning ELs to practice using active verbs to tell about playing on the playground.

Intermediate

Provide sentence frames to help students talk about the verbs during the practice activity. For example:

The verb ______ is stronger than the verb ______.

_______ is a strong verb because ______.

Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.