

Playing Actions

An action is a movement of the will; it is often connected to physical activity, but activity alone does not an action make.

A strong action expresses vividly an emotional state, but does not call upon the actor to “play” emotions. An action is expressed as a verb, “to _____,” not as “to be _____.” Examples: “To be sad” is vague and encourages the actor to try to summon an emotion on cue; “to mourn” is specific and playable, as are “to grieve” or “to lament.”

A strong action expresses subtext and encourages interesting, concrete choices. Example: “to inquire” is general and weak; “to probe” “to harass” or “to finagle” are strong forms of inquiry which specifically express a situation or relationship.

Action in relation to others are also called tactics; tactics are analogous to directions of physical movement. In relating to others, we may move toward them or away from them, and position ourselves below (submissive to) or above (superior to) them. We may move obliquely—side to side—or plant ourselves firmly in one spot. Though actions are not always directly expressed through the direction of physical movement, using this analogy can be helpful in finding the strongest action. Thus, action verbs can be generally classified as follows:

<u>Action Classification</u>	<u>Direction of Movement</u>
aggression	toward and above
approach	toward and below
rejection	away and above
retreat	away and below
avoidance	side to side
vacillation	side to side
standing pat	planted

Actions in relation to ourselves express emotional or intellectual processes and generally don’t have a consistent directionality.

Classifications are a convenience, but it should be noted that many actions may fall into more than one category: “to ridicule” is usually a rejection but may also be used as an attack; “to entertain” is usually an approach but may sometimes be an avoidance.

The attached list contains nearly a thousand action verbs roughly classified as above. The list is intended as a resource and a stimulus to imagination—it is by no means exhaustive!

Actions: Aggressive

abuse	blurt bluster	demolish	incite	overthrow	terrify
accost	bluster	demoralize	incriminate	overwhelm	terrorize
admonish	boast	destroy	inflame	persist	thrash
advance	bombard	devour	infringe on	petrify	threaten
affront	boss	dictate	infuriate	pierce	thrust
aggravate	bother	discipline	inject	pin	thwart
agitate	brag	disgrace	injure	plunder	topple
alarm	brave	dispute	inspect	poke	toss
ambush	buck	disrupt	insult	police	toughen
anger	bug	dog	interfere	pose	tousle
annihilate	bully	dominate	interrogate	pounce	trample
annoy	bushwhack	dress down	interrupt	preempt	transcend
antagonize	capture	drill	intimidate	press	traumatize
appall	castrate	drive	intrude on	prick	trespass
apprehend	ensor	dupe	invade	prod	triumph
appropriate	challenge	egg on	investigate	provoke	tromp
argue	charge	emphasize	irk	pulverize	trounce
arise	chase	enrage	irritate	puncture	tussle
arm	chastise	entrap	jab	push	twist
arouse	checkmate	erupt	jolt	rankle	tyrannize
arrest	chide	escalate	jostle	rap	undercut
assail	claim	evict	jump	rattle	undermine
assault	clamp down	explode	lash	rebut	unmask
assert	claw	exploit	lecture	reprimand	unnerve
astonish	clobber	expose	libel	repudiate	unsettle
attack	coerce	fabricate	loom over	repulse	upbraid
attest	command	face	madden	retort	usurp
avenge	compel	fluster	manipulate	rip	vanquish
aver	compete	foil	menace	scare	vex
avow	complain	forbid	misdirect	scold	victimize
awaken	confront	force	mislead	scorch	vie
ax	connive	frighten	molest	shatter	vindicate
backbite	conquer	gall	muster	snap	wallop
badger	conspire	goad	nag	snarl	warn
bad-mouth	contend	grapple	nail	spar	weasel
baffle	contest	grill	needle	squelch	whack
bait	contradict	gripe	negate	stab	wheelde
bamboozle	counter	grouse	object	stalk	whitewash
ban	counter-attack	halt	obstruct	startle	whore
banish	crack down	hammer	offend	stifle	win
bar	cross-examine	harangue	oppose	sting	wither
barrage	crowd	harass	oppress	stop	wound
bark	crush	harm	order	strafe	wrangle
battle	curse	harp at	oust	straightarm	wrestle
beat	damn	hassle	outshine	strike	zap
bedevil	dare	hate	outwit	stun	
belabor	debate	heckle	overcome	stupefy	
berate	defeat	hinder	overpower	subjugate	
besiege	defend	hiss	override	subvert	
blast	defy	hound	overrule	surmount	
bludgeon	delay	hustle	overrun	surpass	
bluff	demand	impose	overshadow	swagger	

Approach

absolve	caress	enfold	implant	nestle	rouse
accept	caution	engage	implore	notice	scintillate
acclaim	champion	engross	imply	nourish	scrutinize
accommodate	charm	engulf	impress	nudge	seduce
acknowledge	chat	enjoy	include	nurse	serve
acquaint	charter	enlighten	infatuate	nurture	smother
adapt	cheer	enrapture	infect	oblige	snoop
administer	cherish	entertain	inflate	offer	snuggle
admire	clasp	enthrall	influence	open up to	socialize
adore	cleave to	entice	ingratiate	orate	softsoap
advertise	cling	entreat	initiate	ordain	solicit
advise	clown	envelope	insist	overpraise	soothe
advocate	coax	exaggerate	inspire	overprotect	steer
affirm	coddle	exalt	instigate	overrate	strengthen
aid	collaborate	excite	instill	pamper	subdue
amuse	comfort	excuse	instruct	pander to	suffocate
announce	commend	exhort	intercede	pardon	suggest
anoint	commit	explore	interest	penetrate	supplicate
appeal	compare	extol	intervene	perform	support
appease	compromise	eye	interview	persuade	surprise
applaud	con	fall for	intoxicate	petition	suspect
approve	confide	finagle	intrigue	pitch	swear
assist	congratulate	flatter	introduce	pity	sympathize
assuage	conjure	flirt	invest	plead	tantalize
assure	console	follow	invigorate	please	tempt
attend	consult	fondle	invite	pledge	tend
award	convince	forgive	involve	preach	testify
baby	coo	fortify	hest	preside	thank
back	cooperate	foster	join	prime	tickle
banter	corroborate	free	joke	prize	tiptoe
bare	counsel	galvanize	justify	probe	titillate
bargain	cradle	gibe	kibitz	profess	toast
barter	crave	give	kid	prompt	touch
becalm	crusade	glamorize	laud	propose	tout
beckon	cuddle	glorify	lavish lead	protect	trail
bedazzle	dazzle	gossip	lead	pry	transport
beg	declaim	gratify	lean on	psychoanalyze	treat
beseech	delight	greet	leer	puff	tug
bewitch	delve	guide	level with	pull	tweak
bless	dicker	gush	liberate	pump	unarm
bolster	disarm	haggle	lift	pursue	unburden
boost	disclose	hail	love	ratify	unify
bribe	dissuade	hasten	lure	ravish	unveil
brighten	divulge	hawk	lust after	recommend	uplift
broach	dote	help	massage	recruit	validate
broadcast	dramatize	hint	meddle	rectify	volunteer
bubble	ease	hold forth	mediate	regale	vouch
burble	electrify	honor	milk	relieve	vox
buttonhole	embrace	hook	mirror	remind	welcome
cajole	enchant	hover	mollify	repay	whet
calm	encircle	humor	moralize	rescue	worship
campaign	encourage	hypnotize	motivate	reveal	
canonize	endear	idealize	mystery	revere	
captivate	endorse	imitate	negotiable	romanticize	

Rejection

abandon	criticize	diminish	eject	judge	recoil
abolish	debase	disapprove	embarrass	knock	reject
abominate	decline	disavow	envoy	leave	relegate
abrade	decry	discard	exclude	malign	repel
alienate	defame	discharge	finger	mimic	resent
ape	deflate	disclaim	flaunt	minimize	rid
back out	degrade	discount	fool	mistrust	scoff
balk	deign	discourage	forsake	mock	sever
begrudge	demean	discredit	gloat	mortify	slash
belittle	denigrate	disdain	harden	neglect	smear
besmirch	deny	disillusion	humiliate	obfuscate	smirk
betray	deplore	dismiss	ignore	ostracize	sniff
burn	deprecate	disobey	impugn	patronize	snort
bury	deride	disown	insinuate	persecute	taunt
castigate	desert	disparage	intimate	plot	welsh
chafe	despise	distance	invalidate	prohibit	
condemn	\detest	distrust	jeer	rake over	
condescend	detract	doubt	jilt	rebel	

Retreat

abscond	budge	creep	forfeit	regret	tattle
accede	capitulate	cringe	give in	relent	thaw
acquiesce	cease	crumble	give out	relinquish	tire
admit	collapse	defer	give up	resign	tremble
allow	comply	drop back	hide	retract	weary
apologize	concede	drop out	intellectualize	retreat	whimper
assimilate	condone	elude	lag	scramble	whine
atone	conform	escape	melt	settle	wilt
back away	consent	fall back	obey	shrink	wince
back down	cop out	fall flat	pacify	shrug	withdraw
back off	cower	fear	permit	simper	yield
backpedal	crack	flee	quit	submit	
bemoan	crawl	flinch	recede	succumb	

Avoidance

avert	dally	dillydally	duck	forestall	sulk
avoid	dawdle	distract	evade	pout	
block	deflect	divert	fake	rationalize	
conceal	digress	dodge	feign	sidestep	

Vacillation

babble	flounder	hem	shudder	swerve	waffle
equivocate	fluctuate	hesitate	shuffle	teeter	wander
fiddle	fumble	quibble	squirm	totter	waver
fidget	grope	ramble	stammer	twitter	wriggle
flail	hedge	shift	straddle	vacillate	yammer

Standing Pat

abide	brace	grid	resolve	suppress	withstand
absorb	clam up	hold to	restrain	temper	
abstain	cope	Hold out	stand ground	tolerate	
await	endure	reconcile	stand pat	weather	
ball up	freeze	resist	stipulate	withhold	

Intellectual Processes

analyze	consider	dissect	gauge	realize	weigh
comprehend	deduce	figure	infer	reckon	
compute	deliberate	foresee	plumb	surmise	

Emotional processes

agonize	celebrate	expect	hunger	pray	smolder
anguish	crow	exult	imagine	pretend	stew
anticipate	daydream	fantasize	lament	puzzle	suffer
bask	despair	fret	languish	radiate	sweat
beam	discover	fritter	long	reflect	swoon
bereave	dread	frolic	mourn	rejoice	tighten
bridle	dream	fume	mull over	reminisce	toil
bristle	droop	fuss	muse	revel	wallow
brood	effervesce	grieve	palpitate	rhapsodize	wish
browse	effuse	grumble	panic	ruminare	wonder
carouse	enthuse	hallucinate	plan	seethe	yearn
cavort	envisage	hope	ponder	sizzle	