

Active vs. Passive

UNDERSTAND HOW BOTH ACTIVE AND PASSIVE SENTENCES ARE STRUCTURED.

Active Voice: The subject of the sentence is the one doing the action.

- The researchers **compared** the behavior of two groups of children.
- The clerk **was helping** the customer.
- Students **need** good study skills to succeed in college.
- You **should tell** him.

Passive Voice: The subject of the sentence is now being acted upon. The actor moves to the end of the sentence with *by* or drops off altogether if it is unimportant or unknown. The verb must include a form of *be*, followed by a past participle (normally an *-ed* ending).

- The behavior of two groups of children **was compared** (by the researchers).
- The customer **was being helped** (by the clerk).
- Good study skills **are needed** to succeed in college.
- He **should be told**.

Use **ACTIVE VOICE** unless there is a good reason not to.

Active voice can make your writing more vivid, in part because it requires strong, active verbs.

Passive (weak):

The coast was ravaged by the storm.

Active (vivid):

The storm ravaged the coast.

Passive (weak):

Attitudes were formed after the plaintiff's testimony.

Active (vivid):

The plaintiff's testimony influenced the jury's attitude.

Active voice adds clarity and places responsibility where it belongs. It lets us know exactly who did (or said) what to whom.

Passive:

The students were advised to go to the Center for Writing.

Active:

The instructor advised her students to go to the Center for Writing.

Passive:

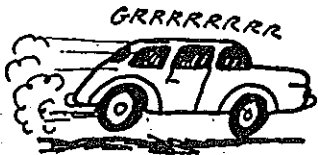
When Iraq was invaded, many civilians were killed inadvertently.

Active:

When U.S. troops invaded Iraq, they inadvertently killed many civilians.

IT IS WRITTEN—I WROTE IT!

The title above gives examples of both the passive and the active voice. A verb is in active voice when its action is performed by its subject. A verb is in passive voice when the action is performed on the subject.



Example: Active: The car hit the tree.
Passive: The tree was hit by the car.



Passive voice puts the action of a sentence in a weak and awkward position. Active voice usually makes writing more forceful and dynamic. (High school and college teachers often give less credit to written work which consistently employs passive voice.)

The sentences below employ either active or passive verbs. Smile when you read each active sentence. Rewrite each passive sentence to make it active.

- 1. The teacher taught the lesson.

- 2. We were embarrassed by the bad joke.

- 3. My purse was stolen.

- 4. I recognized the thief!

- 5. The thief was put in jail.

- 6. I've lost my mind!

- 7. Have the grades been recorded?

- 8. The story has never been told.

- 9. Are those the eggs brought by the Easter bunny?

- 10. Is this the hat upon which an elephant sat?



Name _____