

Active and Passive Voice

The active and passive voices have appropriate uses and settings, and using them appropriately will make your writing more effective.

The **active voice** is used in concise, non-scientific writing, like newspapers or in the humanities. Active voice helps to emphasize WHO did the action, rather than what the action was.

Passive voice is often used in scientific writing because it emphasizes WHAT was done, not who did it. It is also used to de-emphasize the “who”, especially when the “who” is unclear or unimportant.

Emphasize the ACTOR or OBJECT

The **active voice** assigns more responsibility to the actor. The **passive voice** will shift the focus away from the actor if he/she does not want to be responsible or if it is not needed.

Key Elements:

Actor: the “who” of the sentence
Verb: the “action” of the sentence
Object: the “what” of the sentence

Examples:

Active: **More than half of the athletes** *passed* their challenging classes.

Passive: The challenging classes *were passed* by more than **half of the athletes**.

Active: **BP** *spilled* 210 million gallons of oil in 2010.

Passive: 210 million gallons of oil *were spilled* in 2010.

Active: **Dr. Jones** *delivered* baby Emily today.

Passive: Baby Emily *was delivered* today.

Keep it CONCISE

The **active** voice generally makes a sentence shorter and to the point. The **passive** voice will make a sentence longer and wordier.

Examples:

Active: **The dog** *bit* me.

Passive: I *was bitten* by **the dog**.

Active: **The student** *uses* many unnecessary words.

Passive: A lot of unnecessary words *have been used* by **the student**.

Additional Resources

- Toadvine, April, Brizee, Allen, and Angeli, Elizabeth. "Active and Passive Voice." *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2012. Web. 30 Oct. 2013. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/01/>
- "Active/Passive Voice." *Online Writing Support*. Towson University, n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2013. <http://www.towson.edu/ows/activepass.htm>
- "Revising Passive Constructions." *Guide to Grammar and Writing*. Capital Community College Foundation. n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2013. http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/passive_quiz.htm
- "Use the Active Voice." *The Writer's Handbook*. The Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2012. Web. 30 Oct. 2013. http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CCS_activevoice.html
- "Passive Voice." *The Writing Center*. The Writing Center at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2013. <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/passive-voice/>