



Active Voice and Passive Voice

Defining “Voice”

- “Voice” is a characteristic of verbs which indicates the relation of the verb’s action to its subject.
- The voice of a verb may be either “active” or “passive.”

Active Voice

- Active voice verbs are used when the subject is acting in a sentence.

Example:

- **Cindy steered the boat.**

“**Steered**” is an active verb because it allows the subject to undertake an action.

Passive Voice

- “Passive voice” verbs are used when the subject is being *acted upon* in a sentence.
- Example:
 - The mountain’s peak was reached by Ed Danvers.
- “Was reached” are considered passive because they indicate that the subject (peak) is receiving an action.

When to use ACTIVE VOICE

- Active voice is used for **most non-scientific writing**.
- Using active voice for the majority of your sentences makes your meaning clear for readers, and keeps the sentences from becoming too complicated or wordy.
- Even in scientific writing, too much use of passive voice can cloud the meaning of your sentences.

When to use PASSIVE VOICE

- Use the passive voice to emphasize the receiver of an action rather than the performer of the action.
- This is the voice used when writing formal papers such as: term papers, documented essays, and theses.
- Passive voice is used in scientific writing and is also useful when a writer needs to say something indirectly.

So What?

Although both constructions are grammatically correct, the active voice is usually more effective in academic and business writing because it is simpler and more direct.

The passive construction is effective only when the doer of the action is unknown or irrelevant.

Examples

- The cruise liner was hijacked.
- The ball was hit.
- The town was quarantined.

Review

Active voice verbs: Verbs that indicate the sentence's subject as *actively* acting:

Marvin hit the ball.

Passive voice verbs: Verbs that indicated the sentence's subject as being acted upon:

The ball was hit by Marvin

Quiz

Decide which of the following sentences use the passive voice and which sentences use the active voice. Correct the sentences that contain either inappropriate uses of passive voice or an abrupt shift from active to passive voice.

Example:

-Before I began my research, only German fascism was studied by me.

Passive construction

-Before I began my research, I only studied German fascism.

Practice

Identify the direct subject/action/object, and then rewrite to change the grammatical voice:

1. The software will be released by Oracle tomorrow.
2. The test was failed by over half the engineering students.

Practice

Identify the direct subject/action/object, and then rewrite to change the grammatical voice:

1. Using this technique will prevent accidents.
2. The president reported that the weapons were not found.

Active Voice

- Rizal loves biology.
- He spent countless hours doing extensive research on the subject when he was still a student.
- Dr. Jose Rizal gave inspiration to his countrymen.

Passive Voice

- Biology is loved by Rizal.
- Countless hours were spent by Rizal doing extensive research on the subject when he was still a student.
- His countrymen were given inspiration by Rizal.

Let's Practice

Directions:

Change the sentences below to the **active voice**.

1. The statue is being visited by hundreds of tourists every year.
2. My books were stolen by someone yesterday.
3. These books had been left in the classroom by a careless student.
4. Coffee is raised in many parts of Hawaii by plantation workers.
5. The house had been broken into by someone while the owners were on vacation.

Let's Practice

Directions:

Change the sentences below to the passive voice.

1. Children cannot open these bottles easily.
2. The government built a road right outside her front door.
3. Mr. Ross broke the antique vase as he walked through the store.
4. When she arrived, the changes amazed her.
5. The construction workers are making street repairs all month long.