

Grammar Worksheets: Active and Passive Voice

Exercises: Convert each sentence from active to passive or from passive to active. Justify your decision.

1. When the Phillies's Shane Victorino overran him, third base was stolen by Johnny Damon.

2. A happy Thanksgiving is wished by me for everyone.

3. The attorney general indicted the notorious gangster, Al Capone, for federal income tax evasion.

4. The student services committee forwarded revised disciplinary procedures to the campus president.

5. Six Thousand shares of Disney stock were bought by Jenny Allen when she was only nineteen.

6. People can view the dazzling meteor shower from the observation tower at the planetarium.

7. The acceptance letter from Harvard was received by Jenny Arteaga last Tuesday.

8. An invitation to Francis Suarez's victory party was received by Mr. Packer, the state party chairman.

9. The Baseball Writers Association of America named Joe Mauer, the Minnesota Twins' catcher who led the American League with a .365 batting average, MVP for 2009.

Level 1: 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.
6. The party will celebrate his retirement.
7. His professors were discussing his oral exam right in front of him.
8. My son ate all the homemade cookies.
9. Corrosion had damaged the hull of the ship.
10. Some children were visiting the old homestead while I was there.

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.
6. A woman was being carried downstairs by a very strong firefighter.
7. The streets around the fire had been blocked off by the police.
8. Have you seen the new movie that was directed by Ron Howard?
9. My car is in the garage being fixed by a dubious mechanic.
10. A great deal of our oil will have been exported to other countries by our government.

Level 2 Revision Practice: Avoiding Passive Voice Verbs

Read this essay carefully paying special attention to passive voice verbs. Revise the essay by changing the passive verbs into active verbs where appropriate.

Mistakes

1. Technological civilization has reached its
2. present "advanced" state by the trial-and-error behavior of
3. those who lived before us. Many of the most useful
4. discoveries and inventions were the result of mistakes when
5. people were looking for something else. The New World was
6. found by Columbus, who was really looking for India. The
7. discovery of penicillin was speeded by somebody who left a

8. loaf of bread out to get moldy. Think how far behind
9. ourselves we'd be now if mistakes were impossible for us to
10. make.
11. Our knowledge is also increased by our mistakes, if
12. only because once a mistake has been made, a way of
13. correcting it must be found. If the mistake had not been
14. made by us in the first place, we might have had no reason
15. to learn how things are done. As I wrote the first version
16. of this essay, I made a few minor errors. As a result of my
17. mistakes, since I did discover them, I learned the
18. difference between continuous and continual; I learned that
19. useful has only one | (and that the rule goes for hundreds
20. of other words, like wasteful, harmful, spoonful); and I
21. learned how to use a semicolon when a comma won't do.
22. Had I made no mistakes in the first place, I might
23. have had a pretty good essay, but I would still not have
24. known why.
25. Of course, mistakes have to be recognized for what they
26. are. If Columbus had thought San Salvador was India and let
27. things go at that, the world would be smaller today. Had
28. the moldy bread been tossed to the birds, the birds might
29. have become healthy while human life went on suffering from
30. raging diseases. (I realize these statements are somewhat
31. doubtful, but now I'm so curious about Columbus and
32. penicillin that I'm going to learn the real facts
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34. Mistakes are made by computers, but only rarely by
35. comparison with the human brain's continual bumbling. Human
36. beings, one might say, have emotions and desires and
37. prejudices that mistakes are the result of. Those quirks,
38. are not things that computers have. Distractions,
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41. danger. If the time should ever come when most of the
42. world's work is done by computers rather than by people,
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44. fewer of those useful discoveries and inventions brought
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Grammar Worksheets: Active and Passive Voice

<http://www.grammar-worksheets.com>

The term voice, when used in English grammar, refers to the structure of a sentence. There are two "voices" in English grammar, active voice and passive voice.

Active Voice: In an **active voice** sentence, the **agent** (the one who does the action in the sentence) is stated explicitly as the grammatical subject. The thing that the agent does something to (the direct object) comes after the verb. Here's an example.

Active Voice Sentence: Julio cooked fried rice.

"Julio" is the **agent**. He's the one who does the action. In this case, he's the one who cooked the rice. In this active voice sentence, Julio is the **grammatical subject**. What did Julio cook? He cooked fried rice. The words fried rice make up the **direct object**. The fried rice is the thing that the agent (Julio) does something to. In this case he cooked it.

Passive Voice: In a **passive voice** sentence, the thing that the agent does something to, is placed as the grammatical subject of the sentence. The agent (the one who does the action) is placed after the subject, usually in a prepositional phrase. In fact, sometimes the agent is hidden, not even mentioned.

Passive Voice Sentence: The fried rice was cooked by Julio. (The agent is mentioned.)

Passive Voice Sentence: The fried rice was cooked. (The agent is not mentioned.)

In Academic Writing, Use the Active Voice. Use the active voice in most of the writing you do in school and at work. Studies in readability indicate that active voice sentences, where the agent is stated first, are easier to understand than passive voice sentences.

So When Should You Use the Passive Voice?

1. When the receiver of the action is more important than the agent.

Active Voice: The Nobel Foundation awarded President Obama the Nobel Peace Prize.
Passive Voice: President Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The passive voice construction places the emphasis on the receiver of the Nobel Peace Prize, not on the organization that awarded the prize.

2. When you consciously try to minimize the role of the agent or the agent is not known.

Active Voice: Marie Jenkins could not complete the status report because James McDonald misplaced the manufacturing data.

Passive Voice: The status report was not completed because manufacturing data were misplaced.

3. When you write about scientific, technical, or natural processes.

Active Voice: The conveyor belt delivers the shrink-wrapped product to the packing station.

Passive Voice: The shrink-wrapped product is delivered to the packing station.

Using active voice or passive voice is a stylistic and rhetorical choice about sentence structure. It's important to understand the structure so that you control the structure instead of letting the structure control you. But remember; use the **active voice** in most of your academic and work-related writing.

Choosing between Active and Passive Voice Verbs when Writing

Usually, effective writing uses the active voice and shuns the passive. Nevertheless, some situations are awkward or inappropriate when expressed in the active voice. Certainly, these situations call for the passive voice.

Reasons to use the passive voice:

- The agent (doer) of the action is unimportant.
- The pyramids **were built** thousands of years ago.
- The agent is unknown.
- Several robberies **were committed** during the night.
- The agent is common knowledge, and mentioning it would be redundant.
- George Bush **was elected** in 2000.
- The writer desires to control focus of sentence.
 - 1) to de-emphasize the agent's role in the action
 - The alarm was triggered by my son. [Passive construction shifts focus away from the son's responsibility.]
 - 2) to emphasize the party receiving the action
 - **Jack** was kicked by Jill.

Reasons to use the active voice:

- The active voice is shorter and more direct.
- Compare.

Active: The waiter dropped the tray of food.

Passive: The tray of food was dropped by the waiter.

- The active voice is less awkward and clearly states relationship between subject and action.
- Compare.

Passive: Your request for funding has been denied by the review committee.

Active: The review committee denied your request for funding.

- The active voice sentence pattern propels the reader forward through your writing thus avoiding weak prose.

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Identifying Passive Voice Verbs AR 1/21/02

Verbs have two voices: **active** and **passive**.

In **active voice sentences**, the verb expresses the action in the sentence, the subject performs the action, and the object is the recipient of the action. Active sentences follow the pattern: subject-verb-object.

Jill kicked Jack.

In a **passive voice sentence**, the subject and object flip-flop. The subject becomes the passive recipient of the action.

Jack was kicked by Jill.

Form of Passive Voice Verbs

The passive voice requires a "double verb" and will always consist of a form of the verb "to be" and the past participle (usually the "en/ed/t" form) of another verb.

Example: is kicked

Writers should be familiar with the forms of "to be" so that they can easily identify the passive voice in their work.

Review the forms of "to be": am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been

Note the forms of "to be" in the examples of the verb "to kick" in various forms of the passive voice:

is kicked-----had **been** kicked
was kicked-----is going to **be** kicked
is being kicked-----will **be** kicked

has **been** kicked-----can **be** kicked
was **being** kicked-----should **be** kicked

Often passive voice sentences will contain a **"by" phrase** indicting who or what performed the action. Passive sentences can be easily transformed into active sentences when the object of the preposition "by" is moved to the subject position in the sentence.

Passive: The cookies were eaten **by the children**.
Active: The children ate the cookies.

Passive: The tunnels are dug **by the gophers**.
Active: The gophers dug the tunnels.

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Adapted from *Readable Writing: Revising for Style* by H. Wendell Smith p 112-114.

Answers for Level 2 Revision Practice: Avoiding Passive Voice Verbs

You should have used the active voice to replace passive in lines 5-6, 7-8, 11, 12, 1, 25, 34, 37, 39, and 42-43. Remember an occasional passive-voice sentence, if not awkward, may be appropriate.

Note Style: *Ten Lessons in Clarity & Grace* by Joseph M. Williams contains a really nice discussion of passive voice and exercises (pp. 72-83). The book is located in the style section of the Writing Center library.

Level 3: Working with Passive Voice Constructions

Directions: Identify and eliminate the passive constructions in the sentences below.

1. The particular topic chosen by the instructor for study in his section of English 2 must be approved by the Steering Committee. [Hint: Start with "The Steering Committee."]
2. Recommendations concerning the type of study needed to assure adequate definition of the larger problem and develop feasible options in programs designed to eliminate or greatly reduce both the direct and indirect effects within a reasonable time and at acceptable cost were presented in the report. [Begin with "The report."]
3. Avoidance of such blunders should not be considered a virtue for which the student is to be commended, any more than he would be praised for not wiping his hands on the tablecloth or polishing his shoes with guest towels. [Hint: Begin with "We should not."]
4. Collaborative analytical determinations were utilized to assess the probable consequences of mechanical failure. [Start with "Analysts."]
5. The difference between restrictives and nonrestrictives can also be better approached through a study of the different contours that mark the utterance of the two kinds of element than through confusing attempts to differentiate

- the two by meaning. ["One can."]
6. Individuals whose income is insufficient to lift them above poverty must be provided with assistance from public sources. [Start active, and try "Supplement."]
 7. In the next thirty-five years it is expected that there will be more engineering work to be done than has been done in all of recorded history. [Make "The next thirty-five years" the subject.]
 8. If expansion is not accomplished, then two less-efficient alternatives must be acted upon: either the book sales will have to be in separate quarters or else the whole enterprise will have to be moved to a new location. [Try "we."]
 9. Trees on average sites are expected to be about twenty inches in diameter when they are eighty years old if they are managed properly since youth. [Start "Managed properly."]
 10. Any amended declaration should be filed with the Internal Revenue Office with whom the original declaration was filed even if you move to another district.

From *The Complete Stylist and Handbook* by Sheridan Baker (p.181-182)

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