

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

Technological civilization has reached its present "advanced" state by the trial-and-error behavior of those who lived before us. Many of the most useful discoveries and inventions were the result of mistakes when people were looking for something else. The New World was found by Columbus, who was really looking for India. The discovery of penicillin was speeded by somebody who left a loaf of bread out to get moldy. Think how far behind ourselves we'd be now if mistakes were impossible for us to make.

Our knowledge is also increased by our mistakes, if only because once a mistake has been made, a way of correcting it must be found. If the mistake had not been made by us in the first place, we might have had no reason to learn how things are done. As I wrote the first version of this essay, I made a few minor errors. As a result of my mistakes, since I did discover them, I learned the difference between continuous and continual; I learned that useful has only one ! (and that the rule goes for hundreds of other words, like wasteful, harmful, spoonful); and I learned how to use a semicolon when a comma won't do. Had I made no mistakes in the first place, I might have had a pretty good essay, but I would still not have known why. Of course, mistakes have to be recognized for what they are. If Columbus had thought San Salvador was India and let things go at that, the world would be smaller today. Had the moldy bread been tossed to the birds, the birds might have become healthy while human life went on suffering from raging diseases. (I realize these statements are somewhat doubtful, but now I'm so curious about Columbus and penicillin that I'm going to learn the real facts tomorrow.)

Mistakes are made by computers, but only rarely by comparison with the human brain's continual bumbling. Human beings, one might say, have emotions and desires and prejudices that mistakes are the result of. Those quirks, are not things that computers have. Distractions, and fatigue are suffered by human beings but not by computers. So it is possible to say that we are in a bit of danger. If the time should ever come when most of the world's work is done by computers rather than by people, fewer mistakes will be made. And fewer mistakes will mean fewer of those useful discoveries and inventions brought about by the stumblings of the human species.