



Active and Passive Voice

Introduction

Writing assignments and conversations, depending on type, may require either the **active** voice or **passive** voice. Deciding which to use depends on your assignment instructions, objectives, and audience. Understanding how, when, and why to use each is key to being an effective writer and speaker.

The Basics: What are the active and passive voices and what are their different functions?

Active Voice

In the active voice, the subject is performing an action, and the sentence is direct and clear.

Example:

- *The woman* (subject) *drives the car* (action).
- In other words, use the active voice when you want to focus on the action itself.

Example:

- I *wrote* a book.
- I *cleaned* my car.

While not a hard and fast rule, the active voice is a more effective way to communicate the ideas, themes, and facts you'll present in the majority of college writing assignments and verbal presentations.

Passive Voice

In the passive voice, which has a subtler tone, the action's target is the focus, and the verb acts upon the subject.

Example:

- The car (object/target) was cleaned by me (subject).

Remember, use the passive voice when you want to draw attention to the object receiving the action.

Example:

- The book was written by me.
- The car was cleaned by me.

The media often utilizes the active voice in news reports to get to the point quickly.

Example: Thieves *broke into* a local home on Main Street in Brooklyn last night. There is no mention of *who* broke into the home.

The passive voice is also used by scientists and other researchers to explain what action took place, not who performed the action.

Example:

- The chemicals were mixed in the test tube.
- The mice were given fortified water.
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From Passive Voice to Active Voice

What if you want or need to change some of your sentences from passive to active? It's simple. Look at the following examples:

Passive: Game night has always been enjoyed by my family.

Active: My family has always enjoyed game night.

Review: Active vs. Passive Voices

Active	Passive
Thieves broke into a home on Main Street.	A home was broken into on Main Street.
Scientists mixed the chemicals in a test tube.	Chemicals were mixed into a test tube. Or... Chemicals were mixed into a test tube by scientists.
My family met me at the airport	I was met at the airport by my family.
Everyone had a good time.	A good time was had by everyone.
Tom Cruise received an Oscar.	An Oscar was received by Tom Cruise.
Bruce Springsteen presented an award to Taylor Swift.	An award was presented to Taylor Swift by Bruce Springsteen.
Salima gave Anna five dollars.	Five dollars was given to Anna by Salima.