

Passive and Active Voices

Verbs are said to be either **active** or **passive**. This is known as the **voice** of your writing and can affect how your writing is interpreted.

Active	The executive committee approved the new policy.
Passive	The new policy was approved by the executive committee.

Active Voice

- The **subject** is the be-er or the do-er.
 - ◆ Example: **The executive committee** approved the new policy.

Passive Voice

- Does not always include the person or thing 'being' or 'doing'
 - ◆ Example: The new policy was approved.

Writers often use **passive** voice when they wish to:

- Shift emphasis from the be-er or do-er in the sentence to other aspects of the sentence they want to emphasize.
 - ◆ Example: I stole the vase. vs. The vase was stolen.

Passive Verb Formation

We create passive sentences by inserting **a form of the verb "to be"** into the sentence.

- We combine 'to be' with the **past participle** of the main verb
 - ◆ Example: The vase was **stolen** yesterday.
 - ◆ Example: The car will be **washed** tomorrow.

So, When CAN We Use the Passive?

The passive voice does exist for a reason. It is particularly useful, even recommended, in two situations:

- When it is more important to draw our attention to the person or thing acted upon.
 - ◆ Example: The unidentified victim was apparently struck during the early morning hours.
- When the actor in the situation is not important.
 - ◆ Example: The aurora borealis can be observed in the early morning hours.



Attention Scientists!

The passive voice is especially helpful, and often mandatory, in scientific or technical writing and lab reports.

- These are situations where the actor is not really important, but the process and experiment are:
 - ◆ Example: instead of writing "I poured 20 cc of acid into the beaker" in the active voice, write: "Twenty cc of acid was poured into the beaker."

- The passive voice is also useful when describing, say, a mechanical process in which the details of the process are much more important than anyone's taking responsibility for the action.
 - ◆ Example: "The first coat of primer paint is applied immediately after the acid rinse."