



SciWrite 2.x

2.1: Use the active voice

- **active voice**
 - subject → verb → object or subject → verb
 - forces you to be direct
- **passive voice**
 - object → verb → subject or object → verb
 - passive verb: a form of the verb "to be" + the past participle of the main verb
 - to be verbs: is, are, was, were, be, been, am
 - the main verb must be a transitive verb (take an object e.g. throw → ball, run → company)
 - how to recognize?
 - object → verb → subject or just object → verb
 - takes away the responsible party
- example
 - passive: My first visit to Boston will always be remembered by me
 - object: my first visit to boston
 - verb: be remembered
 - subject: me
 - active: I will always remember my first visit to Boston
- Ask: "Who does what to whom?"
 - subject: who

- verb: what
- object: whom

2.2: Is it really OK to use "We" and "I"?

- to use the active voice it is necessary to use we and I
- reasons
 1. the active voice is livelier and easier to read
 2. it is a myth that avoiding first-person pronouns lends objectivity to the paper
 - you (or your team) ran the experiments and interpreted the data. To imply otherwise is misleading
 - the experiments and analysis did not materialize out of thin air
 3. by agreeing to be an author on the paper, you are taking responsibility for its content. Thus, you should also claim responsibility for the assertions in the text by using "We" or "I"
 4. many journals instruct authors to write in the active voice since they also want easy readable papers
- When is it OK to use the passive voice?
 - in the methods section
 - what was done is more important than who did it
 - not important if you did it since it is your paper
 - readers tend to skim the methods section for key words rather than reading it as prose
 - may be more effort than it's worth to avoid using "we" and "I" in every sentence

2.3: Active voice practice

Original: A recommendation was made by the DSMB committee that the study he halted

Edited: The DSMB committee recommended that the study be halted

Original: Major differences in the reaction times of the two study subjects were found

Edited: We found major differences in the reaction times of the two study subjects

Original: It was concluded by the editors that the data had been falsified by the authors

Edited: The editors concluded that the authors falsified their data

2.4: Writing with verbs

- use strong verbs
 - verbs make sentences go!
 - pick the right verb
 - use "to be" verbs purposefully and sparingly
- avoid turning verbs into nouns
 - don't kill verbs by tuning them into nouns
 - verbs often says exactly who does what to whom
 - examples
 - obtain estimates of → estimate
 - has seen an expansion in → has expanded
 - Take an assessment of → assess
- don't bury the main verb
 - keep the subject and main verb (predicate) close together at the start of the sentence
 - readers are waiting for the verb

2.5: Practice examples

- long subject
- passive voice
- negatives
- subject instead of verb
- boring verbs, buried predicate
- "hedge" word
 - raises a lot of questions
 - e.g. it is suspected that
- "to be" is a weak verb
- vague descriptors (e.g. important, worthwhile)
- use more informative adjective (e.g. shifting) than a pronoun (e.g. these)
- adverbs → generally dead weight
 - What does the sentence lose without that word?

2.6: A few grammar tips

- **the word "data" is plural**
 - "data are" not "data is"
- **affect vs. effect**
 - affect is the verb "to influence" (e.g. "the class affected her")
 - affect as a noun: denotes feelings or emotions
 - effect is the noun form of this influence (e.g. "the class had an effect on her")
 - as a verb: effect means to bring about or to cause
- **compared to vs. compared with**
 - compare to = to point out **similarities** between different things

- compare with = to point out **differences** between similar things
 - used more often in science
- **that vs. which**
 - that: restrictive (defining) pronoun
 - "The vial that contained her RNA was lost"
 - which: nonrestrictive (non-defining) pronoun
 - "The vial, which contained her RNA, was lost"
 - *Is your clause essential or non-essential? Is it defining the subject?*
 - THAT: the essential clause cannot be eliminated without changing the meaning of the sentence
 - WHICH: the non-essential clause can be eliminated without altering the basic meaning of the sentence (and must be set off by commas)
- **singular antecedents**
 - do not use "they" or "their" when the subject is singular
 - to avoid gender choice, turn to a plural!