

A choice between passive and active voice

1. Use a passive if the agent of an action is self-evident:
 - a) The voters rejected the president with 54 percent of the vote.
 - b) The president was rejected with 54 percent of the vote.
2. Use a passive if it lets you replace a long subject with a short one:
 - a) Research demonstrating the soundness of our reasoning and the need for action supported this decision.
 - b) This decision was supported by research demonstrating the soundness of our reasoning and the need for action.
3. Use a passive if it gives your readers a coherent sequence of subjects:

“Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying black holes in space. [a or b?]. So much matter compressed into so little volume changes of fabric of space around it in puzzling ways.”

 - a) The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole.
 - b) A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps not larger than a marble.
4. Use an active verb if it is a metadiscourse verb¹:
 - a) The terms of the analysis must be defined.
 - b) We must define the terms of the analysis.

¹ Metadiscourse appears most often in introductions, where writers announce their intentions: *I claim that...*, *I will show...*, *We begin by...*, and again at the end, when they summarize: *I have argued...*, *I have shown...*