

# Active Voice

## Definition of Active Voice

In grammar, an active [voice](#) is a type of a clause or sentence in which a subject performs an action and expresses it through its representative verb. To simply put it, when a subject performs an action directly, it is in active voice. It then uses transitive verb to show the action.

[Style](#) guides usually encourage the use of active voice, because it is clear and direct. For example, “Some customers prefer mulled ale. They keep their mugs on the hob until the ale gets as hot as coffee. A sluggish cat named Minnie sleeps in a scuttle beside the stove” (*The Old House at Home*, by Joseph Mitchell). All of these sentences are in active voice, as the verbs “refer,” “keep,” “get” and “sleep” are in active mode.

## Examples of Active Voice in Literature

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### Example #1: *Harold and Maud* (by Colin Higgins)

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“You know, at one time, I used to break into pet shops to liberate the canaries. But I decided that was an idea way before its time. Zoos are full, prisons are overflowing. Oh my, how the world still dearly loves a cage.”

Active voice in these example sentences is underlined. The subject “I” is performing an action through the verbs “break” and “decided.” The subject “world” is performing an action through the verb “loves.” All the sentences are in active voice.

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### Example #2: *Hillary's Once in a Lifetime* (by Kathleen Parker)

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“Finally, Hillary swept in and moved down a line of huggers toward a raised platform centered in the room...Her positioning meant that she had to keep turning in order to hug back. Around and around and around she turned, 360 degrees, over and over, her arms outstretched in perpetual greeting, like a jewel-box ballerina whose battery has run low.”

Here the subject “Hillary” is taking action through the verbs “swept in,” “moved down,” “had,” “turned,” and “has run.” The verbs are in active mode, the reason that all sentences are in active voice.

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### **Example #3: *Mr. Personality* (by Mark Singer)**

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“Seven days a week, Paul Schimmel ventures into the subway with his clarinet. In the IND station at Sixth Avenue and Forty-second Street one recent afternoon, he paid his fare with a free pass.”

The use of active voice has added directness to this passage. The subject is “Paul Schimmel,” who is doing “ventures,” and has “paid” fare.

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### **Example #4: *Heart of Darkness* (by Colin Higgins)**

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“I looked at him, lost in astonishment...’Ah, he talked to you of love!’ I said, much amused. ‘It isn’t what you think,’ he cried, almost passionately. ‘It was in general.’ ‘He threw his arms up... He had his second illness then. Afterwards I had to keep out of the way; but I didn’t mind. He was living for the most part in those villages on the lake. When he came down to the river, sometimes he would take to me, and sometimes it was better for me to be careful. This man suffered too much.”

In this passage, the author has written all of the sentences in active voice, which are direct and clear in meaning. The verbs of active voice include “looked,” “talked,” “think,” “threw,” “had,” “living,” “came down,” and “suffered.”

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### Example #5: *The Catcher in the Rye* (by J.D. Salinger)

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“If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like... They’re nice and all—I’m not saying that – but they’re also touchy as hell. Besides, I’m not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I’ll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas...”

In this excerpt, the author has used the verbs “hear,” “want,” “saying,” “going,” and “tell” in active voice.

### **Function of Active Voice**

Active voice plays an important role in creative writing and business reports because these types of writings need to be to the point, clear, and direct. It adds interest and helps grab attention of the readers. Not only does it maintain audience’s interest, it also improves the quality of a written work. Active voice gives energy and life to a sentence, as it is less wordy and consequently less difficult. In addition, active voice maintains focus and attention of the readers on a single point.