

Verbs

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Active and Passive Voice - Introduction

Verbs can be used with the active or passive voice.

The active voice is when the person or thing performing the verb is also the subject of the sentence.

The passive voice is when the subject is acted upon by the verb.

Intransitive verbs cannot be used in the passive voice.

The active voice is generally considered to be the normal voice.

Overuse of the passive voice is considered to be poor style.

Active Voice – Examples #1

The active voice is when the person or thing performing the verb is also the subject of the sentence.

The subject always comes before the verb.

The active voice makes the subject the focus of the sentence.

- Peter (subject) is reading (verb) a book (object).
- (*Peter* is performing the action *reading*)

- Jane (subject) ate (verb) a healthy salad (object) yesterday.
- (*Jane* is performing the action *ate*)

- I (subject) will meet (verb) your brother (object) in town today.
- (*I* am performing the action *meeting*)

Active Voice – Examples #2

Sometimes, the active voice acts on itself and is then both subject and object.

This is also referred to as the middle voice.

These types of sentence commonly use reflexive pronouns.

- The singer heard *himself* on the radio.
- I accidentally bit *myself* on the inside of my mouth.
- The model checked *herself* one last time before going onto the catwalk.

Passive Voice – Formation

The passive voice needs to helper verb '*to be*' and takes the past participle form.

The receiver of the action comes before the verb and the agent comes after the verb.

The agent (the person or thing performing the action) is preceded by the preposition '*by*'.

By using the passive voice, we make the object the focus of the sentence.

Passive Voice – Examples #1

The passive voice is when the subject is acted upon by the verb.

The subject would be the direct object in an active voice sentence.

In the passive voice, the object is the focus of the sentence.

- His parents are always praising him. (active)
- He is always being praised by his parents. (passive)

- Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated John F. Kennedy. (active)
- John F. Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald. (passive)

Passive Voice – Examples #2

We also use the passive voice when the agent is unknown, unimportant, or implied.

In these examples, the agents are not even mentioned.

This is only possible in the passive voice.

- My wallet was handed in to the police station. (unknown)
- A musical concert was performed at the town hall. (unimportant)
- Ski equipment is usually sold in the winter months. (implied)

- Overuse of the passive voice is considered to be poor style.