

PASSIVE AND ACTIVE VOICE

OBJECTIVES:

After reading this material, one should know

- what voices of verb are.
- the difference between an active voice and a passive voice.
- why active voice is mostly used in academic writing.
- when to use the passive voice.
- how to convert an active voice sentence to a passive voice sentence.
- how to convert a passive voice sentence to an active voice sentence.

WHAT ARE VOICES OF VERB?

An action of a *subject* in relation to its *object* is known as “**voice**”.

Since we are going to deal with the subjects and objects of sentences, let’s first consider what they are.

SUBJECT

This is the entity that performs the action of the verb in sentences. It can also be defined as “who” or “what” the sentence is about.

Example: Benbill scored the goal.

OBJECT

This is the entity that receives the action of the verb or the entity that is affected by the action of the verb.

Example: The plane carried Meglina to Africa.

We notice that the subject mostly comes before the verb while the object comes after the verb. So we can define subjects and objects based on their positions. In this case, we would say that, the subject is the entity that comes before the verb and the object is the entity that comes after the verb.

What are voice of verbs?

1. Voice is the form a verb takes to indicate whether its subject acts or is acted upon.
2. Voice is defined as the quality of a verb that indicates whether its subject acts or is acted upon.
3. Voice shows whether the subject performs or receives the action.

TYPES OF VOICE

There are two major ways in which a subject expresses its action in relation to its object. These two ways determine the two types of voice that we have and they are,

- A. Active voice.
- B. Passive voice.

There are other types of voice such as the “middle” voice used in the Swedish language. In this voice, the sentence is neither passive nor active.

Example: *Derrick hurt himself*. In this case, the action performed is received by the same entity who performed it. That is “*Derrick*” who performed the action, received it “*himself*”

a) ACTIVE VOICE.

The active voice is the “normal” voice. This is the voice that we use most of the time. In the active voice, the object receives the action of the verb.

- *STRUCTURE OR FORM:*

In the active voice,

1. The subject (the one who performs the action in the sentence) is clearly stated as the subject.
2. The thing that the subject does something to (the direct object) comes after the verb.

That is, it takes the form “subject → verb → direct object”.

Examples:

- a) The dog jumped onto the boy.

Note that the verb can be single or in the phrasal form.

b) Andrew wrote an essay.

Andrew (subject) → wrote (verb) → an essay (direct object).

c) Simon made an apple pie.

Simon (subject) → made (verb) → an apple pie (direct object).

NOTE THAT THE SUBJECT OF THE SENTENCE PERFORMS THE ACTION.

b) PASSIVE VOICE.

The passive voice is less usual. In the passive voice, the subject receives the action of the verb or is acted upon.

In this voice, the thing that the “actual subject” acts upon is used as the subject of the sentence.

We use the passive voice when we want to make the active object more important or when we want to lay more emphasis on the object that is being acted upon.

Note that sometimes the subject is hidden or not even mentioned.

- *STRUCTURE OR FORM:*

In the passive voice,

1. The “actual object” (the thing that is been acted upon) takes the position of the subject.
2. The “actual subject” (the one who performs the action) is preceded by the preposition “by” and comes after the past participle of the verb which is preceded by a “be auxiliary” and takes the place of the object.

Note that it's not always that the presence of a “be” verb makes the sentence passive.

That is, it takes the form “actual object → be auxiliary → past participle of verb → by → actual subject”.

Examples:

a) (1) An essay was written by Amy.

An essay (the actual object) → was (be auxiliary) → written (past participle of verb) → by
→ Amy (the actual subject).

Note that the verb can be single or in the phrasal form.

(2) An essay was written.

An essay (actual object) → was (be auxiliary) → written (past participle of verb).

Note that in the second example the subject is hidden.

b) The boy was jumped on by the dog.

The boy (actual object) → was (be auxiliary) → jumped (past participle of verb) → by → the
dog (actual subject).

Sometimes words in their past participle form are used as predictive adjectives and so do not make the sentence passive. They only turn to add information or qualify the noun or noun phrase.

Example:

1. I am *excited*. (Not passive)

The electron was *excited* by the energy passed through it. (Passive)

2. She was *relieved* to find her. (Not passive)

She was *relieved* of duty. (Passive)

In the above examples, both “excited” and “relieved” as used in the first statements of both examples are only telling us how the subject of the sentence felt but the second sentences of both examples express an action of the subject.

Also, sometimes the indirect object of an active sentence can assume the position of the subject in the passive sentence.

Example: Sandra gave *him* a book. “Him” in the sentence is an indirect object of the verb because although it is affected by the transitive verb “gave”, it is not the primary object of the verb. And it being the indirect object, takes the place of the subject in the passive sentence as in “*He* was given a book”.

WHY ACTIVE VOICE IS MOSTLY USED IN ACADEMIC WRITING.

Active voice focuses ones attention on the subject, which brings clarity. Research shows that active voice sentences (where the subject is stated first) are easier to understand than passive voice sentences.

Example:

Active voice: Kwame beat the girl.

Passive voice: The girl was beaten by Kwame.

We notice that the active voice sentence is less wordy and easy to understand (straight forward) as compared to the passive voice sentence.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT THE PASSIVE VOICE CAN NOT OR SHOULD NOT BE USED IN ACADEMIC WRITING.

WHEN TO USE THE PASSIVE VOICE

1. When the receiver of the action is more important than the subject.

Example:

Active voice: KNUST rewarded Andrew the best student prize.

Passive voice: Andrew was rewarded the best student prize.

In the passive voice, the emphasis is placed on Andrew, the receiver of the prize and not the school that rewarded him.

2. When you intentionally try to minimize the role of the subject or when the subject is not known

Example:

Active voice: Samuel could not complete the year book.

Passive voice: The year book could not be completed.

3. When you write about scientific, technical, or natural processes most especially for scientific processes.

Scientists are usually encouraged to write in passive voice to lend their writing a sense of objectivity (to take themselves, their actions and their opinions out of the experimental work).

That is, the one performing the action should be left out of the statement which makes the sentence passive.

Example:

- a) Active voice: The driver delivered the tools.

Passive voice: The tools were delivered.

- b) Active voice: We sequenced the DNA.

Passive voice: The DNA was sequenced.

- c) Active voice: We believe the mutations cause cancer.

Passive voice: Cancer was caused by the mutations.

4. Writing criminal reports especially when the one who committed the offence is not known.

THE REASON WHY THE PASSIVE VOICE IS REGARDED AS A POOR WAY OF PRESENTING ONE'S THOUGHTS.

The passive voice, although correct, is not the best way to present one's thoughts. This is because when a sentence is put in the passive form, it is easy to leave out the person or thing performing the action. For example, "Gabriel is loved", is passive. The problem with this sentence is that you do not know who loves Gabriel.

Politicians and news presenters often use passive voice to intentionally obscure the idea of who is taking the action. For example, Ronald Reagan famously said, "Mistakes were made", when referring to the Iran-Contra scandal. Other examples are, "Bombs were dropped", and "Shots were fired", as used in news presentation. These statements show that either the one performing the action is not known or is been hid from the public.

Also, according to research, statements made in the passive form is difficult to be understood by less educated people.

HOW TO CONVERT AN ACTIVE VOICE SENTENCE TO A PASSIVE VOICE SENTENCE.

1. Move the sentence's direct object to the sentence's subject slot.

Example:

Active voice	→	Passive voice
Kobby ate <u>the food</u> .	→	<u>The food</u>

"The food" which is the direct object in the active voice becomes the subject in the passive voice.

2. Place the active sentence's subject into a phrase beginning with the preposition 'by' and move it to the object slot.

Example:

Active voice	→	Passive voice
<u>Kobby</u> ate the food	→	The food <u>by Kobby</u> .

"Kobby" who is the subject of the active voice sentence becomes the object of the passive voice sentence and is preceded by the preposition "by".

Other prepositions such as "with" and "to" can be used in place of "by" depending on the subject.

Example:

1. Active voice: I know him.
Passive voice: He is known to me.
2. Active voice: Water fills a tub.
Passive voice: The tub is filled with water.

3. Add a form of the auxiliary verb “be” to the main verb and change the main verb form to the past participle.

Example:

Active voice → Passive voice

Kobby ate the food. → The food was eaten by Kobby.

“Ate which is the verb in the active voice has its form changed and is preceded by a “be” verb (was).”

Example:

Applying all three steps we have,

Active voice → Passive voice

Ama slapped the girl → *The girl was slapped by Ama.*

HOW TO CONVERT A PASSIVE VOICE SENTENCE TO AN ACTIVE VOICE SENTENCE.

1. Move the passive sentence’s subject to the active sentence’s object slot.

Example:

Passive voice → Active voice
The food was eaten by Kobby →ate the food.

“The food” which is the subject of the passive voice is moved to the object slot of the active voice.

2. Remove the “be” auxiliary verb from the main verb and change the form of the verb if necessary.

Example:

a) Passive voice → Active voice
The food was eaten..... →ate the food.

The form of the main verb changed in the active sentence and had no “be” auxiliary verb attached to it.

b) Passive voice → Active voice.

The letter was mailed →mailed the letter.

The “be” auxiliary verb is removed but the form of the verb is not changed in the active voice.

3. Move the passive sentence’s object of the preposition “by” to the subject slot of the active voice.

Example:

Passive voice → Active voice
.....by Kobby → Kobby ate.....

“Kobby” which is the object of the preposition “by” in the passive voice is made the subject of the active voice.

Example:

Applying all three steps we have,

Passive voice → Active voice
The food was eaten by the Kobby. → *Kobby ate the food.*

Group Five

Presentation.