



Passive Voice

In sentences using the active voice, the **subject** of the sentence performs the **action**. In sentences using the passive voice, the **object** of the sentence does the action.

Consider the following examples.

PASSIVE: The fly ball **was caught** by Hernando.

ACTIVE: Hernando **caught** the fly ball.

PASSIVE: The coolant pumps **were destroyed** by a surge of power.

ACTIVE: A surge of power **destroyed** the coolant pumps.

When the **object** of the sentence does **the action** instead of the **subject**, the subject is weakened. Active sentences are more emphatic and vigorous, although there are instances in which the passive voice may be preferred.

Correcting Passive Voice

Turning the passive voice into active is simple once you recognize the construction. Here's how to change passive voice into active voice:

1. **Find the verb in the sentence.**
Example: The cookies were stolen by the toddler.
2. **Determine who or what is performing the action.**
Example: The cookies were stolen by the toddler.
3. **Rewrite the sentence so the actor performs the action.**
Example: The toddler stole the cookies.

When is Passive Voice Useful?

1. **When the recipient of the action is more important than the performer.**
Example: A priceless Rembrandt painting was stolen from the Metropolitan Museum of Art yesterday by three men posing as janitors.
2. **When the actor is far less important than the recipient of the action.**
Example: State senator Joe Murphy was arrested last night on a charge of drunken driving.
3. **When the "who" or "what" is difficult to identify.**
Example: The cargo was damaged during the transatlantic voyage.

Additional Passive Voice Considerations

Recognizing passive voice can be tricky. One tip is to watch for any form of “be” (is, are, was, been, were, etc.) as passive voice will always use a form of “be”. This isn’t always the case, but watch for instances where a form of “be” is used instead of a specific action verb.

Passive voice is not concise, and using it can give the impression that you are trying to “fluff up” your writing. The first example adds two extra words that contribute nothing to the meaning of the sentence (was, by).

Some disciplines expect you to write in either passive voice or third person. Check with your instructor.