

# Voice

## Active Voice

In sentences written in active voice, the subject performs the action expressed in the verb; the subject acts.

The dog bit the boy.

Pooja will present her research at the conference.

Scientists have conducted experiments to test the hypothesis.

Watching a framed, mobile world through a car's windshield reminds me of watching a movie or TV.

In each example above, the subject of the sentence performs the action expressed in the verb.

## Passive Voice

In sentences written in passive voice, the subject receives the action expressed in the verb; the subject is acted upon. The agent performing the action may appear in a "by the ..." phrase or may be omitted.

The boy was bitten by the dog.

Research will be presented by Pooja at the conference.

Experiments have been conducted to test the hypothesis.  
by?

I am reminded of watching a movie or TV by watching a framed, mobile world through a car's windshield.

(agent performing action has been omitted.)

## Choosing Active Voice

In most non-scientific writing situations, active voice is preferred over passive for the majority of your sentences. Even in scientific writing, overuse of passive voice or use of passive voice in long and complicated sentences can cause readers to lose interest or to become confused. Sentences in active voice are generally—though not always—clearer and more direct than those in passive voice.

Passive (indirect) active (direct):

The entrance exam was failed by over one-third of the applicants to the school.

Over one-third of the applicants to the school failed the entrance exam.

The brakes were slammed on by her as the car sped downhill.

She slammed on the brakes as the car speeded downhill.

Your bicycle has been damaged. (agent omitted.)  
by?

I have damaged your bicycle.

Sentences in active voice are also more concise than those in passive voice because fewer words are required to express action in active voice than in passive.

PASSIVE (MORE WORDY) ACTIVE (MORE CONCISE)

→ **Action on the bill** is being considered by **the committee**.

By then, **the soundtrack** will have been completely remixed by **the sound engineers**.

→ **The committee** is considering **action on the bill**.

By then, **the sound engineers** will have completely remixed **the soundtrack**.

### Changing Active to Passive

If you want to change an active voice sentence to passive voice, consider carefully who or what is performing the action expressed in the verb, and then make that agent the object of a "by the../" phrase. Make what is acted upon the subject of the sentence, and change the verb to a form of be + past participle. Including an explicit "by the.." phrase is optional.

→ **The presiding officer** vetoed **the committee's recommendation**.

→ **The committee's recommendation** was vetoed by **the presiding officer**.

→ **The leaders** are seeking a **fair resolution** to the crisis.

→ **A fair resolution** to the crisis is being sought. (by **the leaders**)

→ **Scientists** have discovered **traces of ice** on the surface of Mars.

→ **Traces of ice** have been discovered on the surface of Mars. (by **scientists**)

The presiding

Officer

The leaders

The scientists

In each these example, the passive voice in useful for highlighting the action and whate is acted upon instead of the agent.