

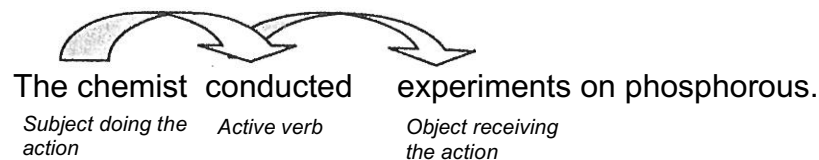


Active & Passive Voice

ACTIVE VOICE

Definition: The subject of the sentence is performing the action of the verb.

Use it: Use active voice when writing most types of papers, like argument, summary, or creative writing. It is generally easier to read and sounds more powerful.

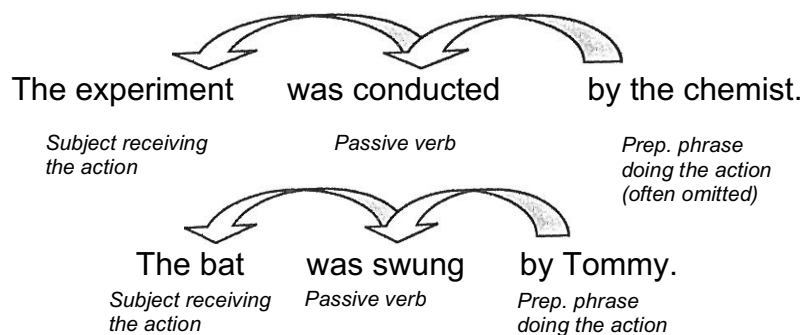


PASSIVE VOICE

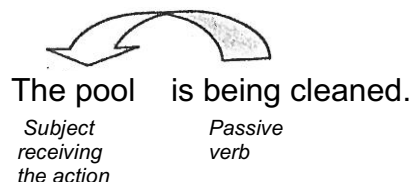
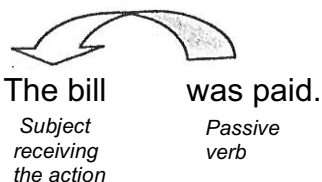
Definition: The subject is receiving the action of the verb (the action is being done to the subject).

- Passive Verb Pattern: [a form of the verb "to be"] + [verb in past tense]
- The person or thing performing the action is not always included in the sentence. If it is included, it will come after the verb in a prepositional phrase that begins with "by."

Use it: Use passive voice when writing lab reports and similar genres, where it is inappropriate to use the words "I" or "we." Passive voice emphasizes the object/thing receiving the action instead of the person/thing doing the action. Therefore, sometimes passive voice is used when the person/thing doing the action is unknown or unimportant.



Passive Voice without the person/thing doing the action: This is used when (1) we know the action happened but do not know who or what did it, (2) it is not important to know who did it, just important to know that the action happened, or (3) because it is inappropriate to use "I".



ACTIVE VOICE THAT LOOKS PASSIVE

Warning: Do not assume sentences are using passive voice just because they have a similar (but still different) verb pattern of [a form of the verb "to be"] + [verb ending in "-ing"].

Remember, the main thing that separates passive from active voice is whether the subject is doing the action or receiving the action.



IS ACTIVE OR PASSIVE VOICE BETTER?

That depends on the situation. What you've probably learned is that **academic papers** should avoid passive writing completely. This is because active voice makes your writing sound more direct, so when you're writing research papers that support an argumentative thesis statement you want your sentences to have more force.

But **scientific papers** usually require passive voice. This is because passive voice takes the agent (in this case, the person who did the experiment) out of the writing. So your lab report should focus less on you, the scientist, and more on (1) presenting the results of the experiment or study and (2) making it easy for readers to follow your process and repeat the experiment themselves to see if they can replicate your results. That's how the scientific community tends to communicate its information.

Passive voice also has a place in **creative writing**. Sometimes an author may want to hide which character performed a certain action or show that the character is distancing him/herself from that action. The author may also decide that passive voice is better for the tone or mood or that passive sentence structure just sounds better in the rhythm of the story.