

## Active vs. Passive Voice

In the **Active Voice**, the Subject (Noun) of a sentence **Performs an Action** (Verb) on an Object. In the **Passive Voice**, the Subject (Noun) is **Acted Upon** (Verb) by an Object. Use of active or passive voice depends on what emphasis you want in your writing. Active voice emphasizes the doer of the action; passive voice emphasizes the recipient of the action.

**Examples:** To switch between passive and active voice, the noun in the object position must change places with the noun in the subject position. Edit the sentence accordingly.

		Subject	Verb	Object
1.	<b>Active</b>	The student	wrote	the essay.

Why: The subject is doing the action, and the object is receiving the action. The subject (student) performed the action (wrote) on the object (essay).

1.	<b>Passive</b>	The essay	was written	by the student.
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Why: The roles of the subject and the object are reversed. The subject (essay) was acted upon (written) by the object (student).

2.	<b>Passive</b>	The essay	was written.	
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Why: The subject is still being acted upon, but the thing doing the action is unknown. This sentence is still passive. The reader just doesn't know who wrote the essay.

2.	<b>Active</b>	The student	wrote.	
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Why: The subject (student) is doing the action (wrote), but what the student wrote (object) is unknown. If a sentence has no recipient of the action, the sentence cannot be written in passive voice since nothing is being acted upon.

Notes: It is always good practice to write in the active voice unless your instructor says otherwise. However, please keep in mind that passive voice is NOT WRONG!

Passive voice is used to draw attention to the action rather than the doer of the action. For example, many scientific reports are written in the passive voice to emphasize the results of the experiment rather than the experiment itself.

## How to tell if a Sentence is in Passive Voice

1. When both the helping verb and the past-tense verb are used, you are using passive voice. Look for **helping verbs** such as “is,” “was,” “were,” and “are.” **Helping verbs** can “help” past-tense verbs such as “written,” “graded,” and “conducted” create the passive voice.

	Subject	Verb	Object
<b>Active</b>	The teacher	graded	the tests

Why: The subject (teacher) performed the action (graded) on the object (tests).

<b>Passive</b>	The tests	were graded	by the teacher.
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Why: The subject (tests) **was** acted upon (graded) by the object (teacher).

<b>Active</b>	The lab assistant	conducts	the experiment.
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Why: The subject (lab assistant) performs the action (conducts) on the object (experiment).

<b>Passive</b>	The experiment	is conducted	by the lab assistant.
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Why: The subject (experiment) **is** acted upon (conducted) by the object (lab assistant).

2. Sometimes no noun exists in the object position. In these situations, try adding “by zombies” to the end of the sentence. If the sentence makes sense with zombies performing the action, it’s probably passive.

	Subject	Verb	“by zombies”
<b>Passive</b>	The tests	were graded	[by zombies].

Why: The preposition “by zombies” tells us that zombies could perform the action of the sentences, which means this is a passive sentence.

<b>Active</b>	The student	wrote	[by zombies].
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Why: The preposition “by zombies” sounds like the student wrote near the zombies instead of the zombies doing the writing, so this is an active sentence.