
Passive voice is an often-villainized method of phrasing a sentence as if the sentence's subject undergoes or receives an action.

When a sentence is written using passive voice, it often inserts any form of the verb "to be" between the subject and the subject's verb. While passive voice isn't generally recommended for personal or academic writing, such as cover letters, personal statements, or critical analyses, it is frequently used in scientific reports and certain forms of creative writing.

Example: The bone was found by a dog.

In this example, the dog is the actual doer in the sentence

When a sentence is written with the objective

Passive voice: A mistake was made that cost the company \$1,000,000.

Active voice: Malik made a mistake that cost the company \$1,000,000.

Creative Writing

Without a subject, passive voice in creative writing can create a sense of suspense or mystery. Both examples below use the passive voice (in italics) effectively for this purpose.

The door was slammed sharply from the outside. Sarah jumped up and rushed to the window, but she couldn't see who had done it. A trail of bloody footprints marked a path from the doorstep to the border of the dark woods.

Alexander slowly returned to consciousness. *His wounded arm was being carefully tended by gentle hands.* A graceful silhouette, backlit by the fire, held a cup of fragrant tea to his lips.

Using passive voice ensures that you can keep the actual doer of the action well hidden until it's time for a big reveal.

Though passive voice has a bad reputation, it is grammatically correct and has plenty of appropriate uses, especially in STEM writing. It is important to know how and when to use both active and passive voice.

Practice switching between active and passive voice using these sentences. First, identify whether or not the sentence is written in active or passive voice. Then, rewrite the sentence in the opposite way – if the example is in active voice, rewrite it in passive voice, and vice versa.

1. The dress was chosen by Christina.
2. Anderson and Kaine published a study on brain activity during sleep.
3. The paper was written quickly by the student.
4. Leon scheduled a long list of activities for the kids.
5. The window paintings were created by students.
6. My first-edition book was signed by the author.
7. Oscar Wilde wrote many plays, including *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
8. The singer wrote and composed every song on the album.
9. Makayla's friend painted her nails.
10. The cake was decorated.

