

The Passive Voice

Why You Should Use the Passive Voice Sparingly

Sentences constructed in the passive voice are often unclear because they focus attention on the object of the action, rather than the subject or actor, by placing the object first. The active voice is stronger and more forceful than the passive voice. Readers also understand active voice sentences more quickly because active voice sentences follow the common English language sentence structure of subject, verb, object. Since the main thought or message is at the beginning of the sentence, readers don't have to search through the sentence looking for the actor or subject. Another advantage of using the active voice is that active voice sentences are usually shorter than passive voice sentences.

Spotting Sentences in the Passive Voice

Here are some tips to help you spot passive voice sentences:

- The person or thing doing the action is introduced with the word *by*:
*A meeting was held **by** the board members.*
- No actor is named in the sentence:
The judge was informed that the jury had reached a verdict.
- A form of the verb "to be" (*to be, be, is, am, are, was, were, been*) followed by a past participle (the past form of a verb, like "given"):
*Testimony **was given** by the doctor that the patient consented to the operation.*
- The subject of the verb is the receiver, not the doer, of the action.
***The pedestrian** was hit.*

When to Make Passive Voice Sentences Active

1. Identify the true actor in the sentence.
2. Put that noun at the beginning of the sentence.
3. Ask: *Is the new sentence clearer?*
4. If it is, ask: *Do I have a good reason for using the passive voice?*
5. If you don't, make the change to the active voice.