

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

What are active and passive voices?

In **active voice**, the subject of the sentence acts, performing the action represented by the verb.

*The essay **argued** for the necessity of using active voice in all academic writing.*

In **passive voice**, the subject of the sentence is acted upon, receiving the action represented by the verb.

*The necessity of using passive voice in scientific writing **was argued** for by the essay.*

When do I use active voice?

Because active voice creates sentences with greater clarity, concision and directness, it is preferred in almost every kind of writing.

When do I use passive voice?

Because passive voice focuses on the action and what is acted upon, rather than on the agent, it is used consistently in scientific writing to create an impression of objectivity and to put emphasis on facts rather than on scientists. In addition, writing that is predominately in active voice may have occasional sentences that are in passive voice. Passive voice is useful when the writer does not want to identify or emphasize the agent of a particular action, perhaps because the agent is not known or not important.

How do I change passive voice to active voice?

Find the agent of the sentence by asking: Who or what is performing this action? Sometimes this information will be in the sentence, following the phrase “by the...” and sometimes the agent may be indicated in nearby sentences. Make the agent the subject of the sentence. Change the verb so that it is appropriate for the subject and for active voice.

The belief that objectivity is an illusion is often argued by postmodern theorists. (passive)

Postmodern theorists often argue that objectivity is an illusion. (active)

How do I change active voice to passive voice?

Find the object of the sentence by asking: What is being acted upon? Make the object of the sentence the subject. Change the verb to passive voice form: a form of “to be” and the past participle of the verb.

A researcher studied reader preferences for active voice. (active)

Reader preferences for active voice have been studied. (passive)