

Name _____
Date _____

Week #6 Active and Passive Voice

Voice: The form a transitive verb takes to indicate whether the subject of the verb performs the action or receives the action.

Active Voice: When the verb is in the active voice, the subject performs the action.

Example: Steve loves Amy.

In this sentence, Steve is the subject, and he is performing the action. He loves Amy, the direct object of the verb.

Passive Voice: When the verb is in the passive voice, the target of the action is moved to the subject position. Thus, the subject receives the action.

Example: Amy is loved by Steve.

In this sentence, the subject of the sentence becomes Amy, but she isn't performing an action. Rather, she is just the recipient of Steve's love. The focus of the sentence has changed from Steve to Amy.

More examples: Note that the preposition "by" often suggests the performer of the action.

Active: The soldier fired the shots.

Passive: The shots were fired **by** the soldier.

Active: I am holding a pen.

Passive: The pen is being held **by** me.

Active: I bought lunch.

Passive: Lunch was bought **by** me.

It is important to remember that passive sentences are not incorrect, but they are not usually the best way to phrase your thoughts. Sometimes passive voice is awkward or vague, and it is usually wordy, so you can improve your writing by replacing passive sentences with active sentences in most cases.

When is passive voice OK?

Sometimes, passive voice has advantages, like when you truly don't know who is performing the action, so you cannot name the subject of the sentence.

◆For example, a police officer might write, "The store was robbed" in a crime report because nobody can identify the robber.

◆Scientists are often encouraged to write in passive voice to lend a sense of objectivity to their writing—to take themselves and their actions and opinions out of the experimental results.

For example, a scientist may write, “The DNA was sequenced” instead of “We sequenced the DNA.”

◆A fiction writer might write, “The cookies were stolen” in a mystery story instead of “somebody stole the cookies.” The difference is subtle, but in the passive sentence “The cookies were stolen,” the focus is on the cookies. In “Somebody stole the cookies,” the focus is on the unknown somebody. Passive voice can create a sense of mystery in your sentence, which is why it’s usually not a good choice when you want your writing to be clear.

◆Use the passive voice when you do not know or do not want to reveal the performer of an action or when you want to emphasize the receiver of the action.

Practice I: Decide if each italicized verb below is in the active voice or passive voice. On the line provided, write **A** or **P**.

- ___ 1. Many beautiful totem poles **were erected** in Alaska.
- ___ 2. Maggie **admired** the carvings on one pole.
- ___ 3. A fierce eagle’s face **was painted** on one pole by a carver.
- ___ 4. A sharp, curved beak **had been created**.
- ___ 5. One carver **had made** a bear’s face.
- ___ 6. A large number of Native Americans **live** in Alaska.
- ___ 7. Numerous salmon **were caught** in their traps.
- ___ 8. The salmon **was smoked** over open fires.
- ___ 9. Some Native Americans **used** shells as money.
- ___ 10. A variety of foods **were found** locally.

Practice II: Rewrite the following sentences to eliminate passive voice by changing verbs in passive voice to active voice.

1. A twenty-one gun salute was fired by the honor guard during the general’s funeral.
2. The car was washed by us but waxed and polished by the garage attendant.
3. The location of the new school building was rejected by the school board
4. Dinner was prepared by the boys, and the dishes were washed by the girls.

5. The window was broken by the baseball hit by the little girl.
6. A new play was taught to the football team by the coach.
7. The rules must be followed by every student.
8. The wreckage of the jetliner was spotted by the pilot of the search plane.
9. The situation was explained by me to the judge.
10. The job was offered to me by the store manager.
11. Jenny was asked to Homecoming by Ryan.
12. The truck was purchased by Travis but driven by Samantha.
13. If the children had been enchanted by Mr. Wright's tale before, they would be even more enthralled by his new story of a fantasy kingdom.
14. While the decorations are being created by Skyler, the buffet will be prepared by Shane.
15. The 1539 expedition of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado was guided by Estevanico, a well-known explorer.