

Passive Voice vs. Active Voice

1. How do you create passive voice?

- The passive is created when you use a “to be” verb + another verb that ends in –ed, or the past tense version of another verb (past participle). (“To be” verbs are: *is, am, are, were, was, been, being*)

**were discovered*

**was killed*

**is enjoyed*

**are taught*

**been proven*

- An alternate way to view the creation of the passive is to consider the players or actors of a sentence. Active voice is arranged as **doer (of action) + action + receiver (of action)**, whereas passive voice is arranged as **receiver (of action) + action + doer (of action)**. For example:

***Active:** The dog (**doer**) bit (**action**) the child (**receiver**).

***Passive:** The child (**receiver**) was bitten (**action**) by the dog (**doer**).

2. Why would you use passive voice?

- Scientific Writing:** In general, the field of scientific writing prefers passive voice because it places emphasis on the **receiver** of the action (the experiment) and moves emphasis off the **doer** (the researcher).
- Agency:** Using passive voice makes sense if the agent (**doer**) performing the action is obvious, unimportant, or unknown. Also, using the passive is effective if the writer wishes to wait until the end of the sentence to mention the agent or if the writer wants to avoid mentioning the agent altogether.

3. What does passive voice look like in a sentence?

The boy **was bitten** by the dog.

Basketball **is enjoyed** by everyone.

The students **were taught** by an experienced professor.



4. How do you change passive voice into active voice?

- To change passive into active, consider who does the action in the sentence (doer). Consider who is performing the actions, move that agent to the subject of the sentence and change the verb accordingly.

5. What does active voice look like in a sentence? (Compare these sentences to the above sentences that are in passive voice—notice how the agent has shifted to the subject of the sentence in these active sentences).

The dog bit the boy.
Everyone enjoys basketball.
An experienced professor taught the students.

6. Some more examples:

Passive	Agent	Active
The book is being read by the class.	most of the class	Most of the class is reading the book.
Results will be published in the next issue.	agent not specified—most likely “researchers”	The researchers will publish their results in the next issue.
A policy of whitewashing and cover-up has been pursued by the CIA director and his close advisors.	the CIA director and his close advisors	The CIA director and his close advisors pursued a policy of whitewashing and cover-up.
Mistakes were made.	agent not specified—most likely “we”	We made mistakes.