

**APSU Writing Center**  
Active versus Passive Voice

**Active versus Passive Voice**

**Active Voice**

- Active sentences are more precise and concise than passive sentences because they explicitly identify the actor acting and follow English's typical word order: subject, verb, and object.
- **Subject + Action + Object = Active Voice**

**How to tell if a sentence is written in an active voice**

- The subject performs the action expressed by the verb.
  - "The cat (subject) chased (verb) the mouse (object)."
  - "She (subject) baked (verb) a delicious cake (object)."

**Active Examples**

- "The chef prepared the meal."
- "I wrote the report."
- "They built the bridge."

**Passive Voice**

- Writers use the passive voice to enhance cohesion, shift focus, or avoid excessive separation between subject and verb.
- **Object + Action + Subject = Passive Voice**

**How to tell if a sentence is written in passive voice**

- The subject receives the action rather than performing it.
  - "The mouse (subject) was chased (passive verb) by the cat."
- A form of the verb "to be" (e.g., was, is, will be, can, had been) is followed by a past participle (e.g., baked, reviewed, written, cleaned, discussed).
  - The cake **was** baked by Mary.
  - The document **is** being reviewed by the committee.
  - The novel **was** written by a famous author.
- Look for "by" phrases
  - The speech was delivered **by** the president.
  - The report was written **by** the team.
- Look for "have/has" and "will"
  - The experiment **has been conducted** by the research team.
  - The data **have been analyzed** by the statisticians.
  - The manuscript **will be reviewed** by the editorial board.

**Passive Examples**

- "The meal was prepared by the chef."
- "The report was written by me."
- "The bridge was built by them."

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**How to Write an Academic Paper**

**Active Voice**

- Use active voice to emphasize the subject acting, making your writing more direct and engaging.
- The active voice often works well for clear, straightforward statements, especially in scientific or technical writing.

**Active Examples**

- "The study **examined** the effects of climate change on biodiversity."
- "The researcher **conducted** interviews with participants to gather data."
- "The team **analyzed** the results and drew conclusions based on the findings."
- "The author **argued** that socioeconomic factors influence educational outcomes."
- "The professor **presented** the findings at the conference."

**Passive Voice**

- Use passive voice to emphasize the action, the object receiving it, or de-emphasize the subject.
- Passive voice is often used when the subject is unknown, less critical, or focused on the action rather than the doer.

**Passive Examples**

- "The effects of climate change on biodiversity **were examined** in the study."
- "Data **were gathered** through interviews conducted with participants **by** the researcher."
- "Results **were analyzed** and conclusions **were drawn** based on the findings **by** the team."
- "It was argued that educational outcomes are influenced **by** socioeconomic factors."
- "The findings **were presented** at the conference **by** the professor."

**Practice determining Active or Passive Voice**

1. I bought bananas at the store today.
2. As curators grow a collection, specific works may be chosen to be kept.
3. It is believed that this new method is safer.
4. Eventually, a construction crew destroyed the theater.
5. The experiment was performed, and the results were recorded.

**Answers**

1. A
2. P
3. P
4. A
5. P



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### Works Cited

Montana State University Writing Center. "Active and Passive Voice." Montana State University Writing Center, [https://www.montana.edu/writingcenter/writing\\_resources/active-and-passive-voice.html](https://www.montana.edu/writingcenter/writing_resources/active-and-passive-voice.html).

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