

ACTIVE VOICE

In writing, there are two types of voices: Active Voice and Passive Voice.

EX:

The class was taught by the teacher (Passive Voice)

The teacher taught the class (Active Voice)

In the passive voice, notice how the TEACHER is not in the subject position (at the front of the sentence).

In the active voice, notice how the TEACHER is in the subject position, allowing TEACHER to be the DOER of the action.

USING ACTIVE VOICE

Active voice is wonderful, because this type of voice allows us to understand the subject and action relationship immediately. Moreover, this type of voice provides us with a much more accurate and concise way of writing.

Usually, you want the main subject in the front of the sentence with the verb following -> SUBJECT + VERB + OBJECT. We call this space the "subject position." And, vice versa, since the object is located at the end, we call this the "object position."

In order to maintain clarity, coherence, conciseness, and consistency, put information in the following order:

Subject (doer) ----- Verb (action) ----- Object (receiver)

In the passive voice, the subject is not doing the action.

EX:

Arnold has been described as a bonehead by reporters. (Passive Voice)

Vs.

Reporters describe Arnold as a bonehead. (Active Voice)

Another important stylistic consideration: Looking at the two constructions again answer the question: How many words are in each sentence? For the passive, there are seven words. For the active, there are only five words. Since most instructors value clear and concise writing, the active voice would seem the most logical choice.

RECOGNIZING PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Passive constructions are easy to identify. Usually, a passive voice sentence contains a form of the infinitive "to be" plus a past participle construction (a verb in a past tense).

TO BE construction + the word DESCRIBED

EX:

am described

am being described

are being described

is being described

do get described

does get described

will be described

was described

were described

did get described

have been described

has been described

had been described

will have been described

ANOTHER FORM OF THE ACTIVE VOICE

Another form of active voice exists. However, this form is very different from the other.

THE IMPLIED-SUBJECT

Commands contain something called the Implied-Subject (or the Implied "YOU"), such as: "Take out the trash."

Notice how there is no subject; the subject is implied. Furthermore, if we analyzed the sentence further, we would find an implied "You" before the actual sentence.

[You] Take out the trash.

Because the subject is in the proper subject position, we consider these types of commands (or imperative structures) to be active.

QUESTIONS & EXCLAMATIONS

We consider questions to be active by default, since they do not usually refer to a clear cut subject and may be shorter than most declarative and imperative sentences.

Likewise, we consider exclamations to be active by default as well.