



Active and Passive Voice

Active Voice

In active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action.

Example: John answered the phone.

Active voice is generally preferred in non-scientific writing to compose sentences that are concise, clear, and easily readable. In addition, active voice often utilizes action verbs that many academics prefer because they are more engaging. Disciplines that use the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) or the American Psychological Association Publication Manual (APA) also value active voice.

Passive Voice

In passive voice, the subject of the sentence is acted upon.

Example: The phone was answered by John.

To recognize passive voice:

- Look for the presence of a be-verb: am, is, was, were, are, been; however, the use of a be-verb does not necessarily indicate passive voice.
- Look for the phrase “by the” following the verb.

Disciplines like biology, psychology, and sociology utilize passive voice during specific situations. The following is a brief list of circumstances in which passive voice is preferred and examples:

- The performer (in this case, the first company to issue a phone book) cannot easily be named or is irrelevant to the discussion.
Example: The first phone book was issued in 1878.
- The performer (in this case, a researcher) is less important than the action or should not be named because it would require the use of “I” or “we.”
Example: The plants were grown in a greenhouse.
- The recipient (in this example, ATP) is the main topic and should be emphasized.
Example: ATP is produced by mitochondria.
- The action, rather than the person doing the action, is emphasized.
Example: The honeybees were taken to the lab.

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