

RECOGNIZING PASSIVE VOICE

PASSIVE VOICE

SUBJECT: PERFORMER OR RECEIVER?

Active voice: the subject performs the verb's action.

Example: Mary ate a pear. (Mary does the eating.)

Passive voice: the subject receives the action of the verb. The actor is either added after the preposition "by" or is not stated.

Example: A pear was eaten by Mary.

A pear was eaten.

VERB: ACTIVE OR PASSIVE?

Passive voice always uses two verbs—a form of the verb "to be" (for example, is, are, was, were, am) and a past participle. Past participles usually end in -ed, -en, or an irregular ending.

<u>Helping verb</u>	<u>Past participle</u>
was	stopped
is	taken
were	told
are	won

Examples: It was eaten by me.
The floor was swept by Mary.
The game was won by the other team.
The man was killed by the car.
The book is being read by Francis.
The cookie is being eaten by the baby.
The men were attacked.
The factory was shut down.
The building was burned to the ground.

HOW TO TEST FOR PASSIVE VOICE

1. Find the verb or verb phrase. Is there a form of "to be" plus a past participle?
2. Find the subject of the sentence. Does the subject receive, not perform, the action of the verb?
3. Is the actor added to the end of the sentence after the preposition "by?" If the actor is not stated, choose a noun that could be the actor and test it at the end of the sentence after "by."

A "YES" TO EACH OF THE QUESTIONS = PASSIVE VOICE

I. DIRECTIONS: Change each of the following sentences into the active voice.

1. The baseball game was played by us in the schoolyard.
2. Trash was thrown all over the field by motorists.
3. The school was closed by the Board of Education.
4. All the classes that I wanted to take had been closed by the registrar.

5. The concert was enjoyed by us.
6. The complicated step was danced by the couple.
7. The jet was bought by our company.
8. The entire cast in the show was fired by the producer.
9. The test was failed by half of the class.
10. The food was eaten by everyone.

ANSWERS:

1. We played the baseball game in the schoolyard.
2. Motorists threw trash all over the field.
3. The Board of Education closed the school.
4. The registrar had closed all the classes that I wanted to take.
5. We enjoyed the concert.
6. The couple danced the complicated step.
7. Our company bought the jet.
8. The producer fired the entire cast in the show.
9. Half of the class failed the test.
10. Everyone ate the food.

II. DIRECTIONS: For additional practice at recognizing the passive voice, write the following sentences in the passive voice.

1. The man fixed the leak.
2. Lightning struck the house.
3. The boy climbed the ladder so that he could get a better view of the roof.
4. The campers cleaned the bunkhouse so that their counselor would give them a star.
5. Yesterday, after we had eaten dinner, we played basketball in the park.

ANSWERS:

1. The leak was fixed by the men.
2. The house was struck by lightning.
3. The ladder was climbed by the boy so that he could get a better view of the roof.
4. The bunkhouse was cleaned by the campers so that their counselor would give them a star.
5. Yesterday, after dinner was eaten by us, basketball was played by us in the park.

WHEN TO USE PASSIVE VOICE

1. Use **passive voice** when the doer of the action is unknown or when mentioning a specific subject is not desirable.

Examples:

- The window was broken during the night.
- The store was robbed.
- The wealthy oil man was kidnapped.
- A pie was thrown at the speaker.

Many stories have been told about the Lindbergh kidnapping.

2. The passive voice is necessary when the doer of the action (the subject) is less important than the action itself or the result of the action.

Examples:

The lost dog was returned by her neighbor.
The Klee painting was stolen by the vandals.
The Stanley Cup was presented by the commissioner.
The annual report was presented by the group leader.

3. Use the passive voice to soften the effect of a complaint.

Example:

My letter was torn by the letter carrier.

instead of

The letter carrier tore my letter.

PASSIVE VOICE PRACTICE

DIRECTIONS: Indicate in the blanks whether the verb in each sentence is in the active voice (A) or the passive voice (P). If the voice of the verb should be changed to emphasize whatever is more important in the sentence (indicated in parentheses), write the transformation (T) below the original sentence. Check your answers using the attached key.

Examples:

Joe threw a carrot at the rabbit. A

(Joe is emphasized)

T: None

The rabbit was hit on the head by the carrot.

(carrot is emphasized)

T: The carrot hit the rabbit on the head. P

The voters elected John president.

(John is emphasized)

T: John was elected president by the voters. A

1. Jill was punished because she broke the rules.
(Jill emphasized)
2. The code of ethics in my house was formulated by my father.
(father emphasized)
3. The drought destroyed every avocado crop in California.
(drought emphasized)
4. Somebody published The Grapes of Wrath in 1939.
(The Grapes of Wrath emphasized)
5. The Pulitzer Prize for literature was won by John Steinbeck for the year's best novel.
(John Steinbeck emphasized)
6. A country with no political unity is easily defeated.
(country emphasized)

7. People value success in our society.
(success emphasized)
8. The trouble was caused by a mischievous little girl.
(girl emphasized)
9. The cost of education has been rising steadily.
(cost emphasized)
10. A benefit concert was organized by members of the Clamshell Alliance.
(the Clamshell Alliance emphasized)

ANSWERS:

1. A
2. P, T: My father formulated the code of ethics in my house.
3. A
4. A, T: The Grapes of Wrath was published in 1939.
5. P, T: John Steinbeck won the Pulitzer Prize for the year's best novel.
6. P
7. A, T: Success is valued in our society.
8. P, T: A mischievous little girl caused the trouble.
9. A
10. P, T: Members of the Clamshell Alliance organized a benefit concert.

SELF TEST

I. DIRECTIONS: Circle the numbers of the sentences that can be put in the passive voice.

1. She went for a walk in the park.
2. My sister is a doctor.
3. I hope to become a lawyer.
4. The actors read the script with great feeling.
5. The cat drank the milk.
6. How old are you?
7. I will build that house.
8. Her name is Jennifer Alison Smith.
9. His father helped me with my math problem.
10. Nobody seems to be responsible for him.
11. The birds fly south at this time every year.
12. The deer ran swiftly in the woods.
13. The dog bit the child's arm.
14. The shark dived underwater.
15. That dress is pretty.

ANSWERS: 4, 5, 7, 9, 13

Remember that good writers rarely use the passive voice, and then only to emphasize what they consider important in the sentence. The active voice is usually a more effective way of saying what you mean—especially since the sentence's subject is always the doer of the action expressed by an active voice verb.

Partial Source: Rubin, Dorothy. *The Vital Art—Reading and Writing*. MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979.

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STUDENT LEARNING ASSISTANCE CENTER (SLAC)

Texas State University-San Marcos