



ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Verbs are used in either the active or passive voice.

In the **active voice** the subject of the verb is the actor or doer:

The boy *hit* the ball. The zooming car *crossed* the finish line.

In the **passive voice** the subject becomes the receiver of the verb's action; the **passive voice** construction *always* uses a helping verb:

The ball *was hit* by the boy.

The finish line *was crossed* by the zooming car.

Why is active voice more effective than passive voice?

A. Sentences with subjects performing the action are more direct, exciting or interesting.

(Weak) A new fiscal plan *was drafted* at the staff meeting yesterday.

(Better) Yesterday, staff members *drafted* a new fiscal plan.

(Weak) Hands *were clapped*, cheers *were shouted* and tears *were shed* by the fans when their team won the World Series.

(Better) Fans *clapped, cheered and cried* when their team won the World Series.

B. Subjects that act force the writer to use powerful verbs, which stimulate the imagination and senses.

(Weak) The jalopy *was driven* down the street.

(Better) The jalopy *careened* down the street.

(Weak) The frisky horse *was ridden* down the lane.

(Better) The frisky horse *bolted* down the lane.

C. Sentences using the active voice are less wordy than passive voice sentences.

(Weak) We hope our candidate *will be elected* by the people of this state.

(Better) *Elect* Mary Jones our next senator.

The passive voice works well to create a mood, such as suspense, when the doer is unknown, or if the writer wants to de-emphasize the doer:

- Sirens *were sounded*, horns *were tooted* and bells *were rung* to celebrate peace. (mood)

- The cookie jar *was smashed* to smithereens. (doer unknown)

- The murder *was committed* by Martin Ulster. (doer de-emphasized)

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