

Using Active Voice

Although passive voice is not grammatically incorrect, using active verbs instead of passive verbs makes writing more direct and immediate. Things happen instead of being talked about, so the writing moves more smoothly and feels more exciting to the reader.

Identifying Passive Voice

You can identify passive voice by looking for one of the eight forms of the verb “to be.”

- **“be” verbs:** am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been

However, a “be” verb by itself does not necessarily mean you have used passive voice. Passive voice is the use of a “be” verb and a past participle. This type of verb construction causes you to leave out the actor who is performing the verb or make the direct object the subject of the sentence. After you identify “be” verbs, check to see if you have combined them with a **past participle**:

- ***past participle:** verb usually ending in –ed

You can also identify passive sentence constructions because the “actor” of the sentence is not in the subject position (before the main verb in the sentence) or may be missing altogether.

In passive sentence constructions, the direct object (the objective or goal of the verb) is in the subject position. Active structure puts the actor in the subject position. To find the actor of a sentence, look for the action word – the verb – and figure out who did the action of the verb. Sometimes, you may need to add an actor to the sentence.

Examples

Passive: The metropolis was terrorized.

- ✓ The actor (the noun who terrorized) is missing.

Passive: The metropolis was terrorized by hordes of zombies.

- ✓ The actor (hordes of zombies) is at the end of the sentence. The direct object (metropolis) is in the subject position.

Active: Hordes of zombies terrorized the metropolis.

- ✓ The actor (hordes of zombies) is added to the subject position, and the object (the metropolis) is receiving the action of the verb (terrorized). The “be” verb is eliminated.

Passive: The children were taught to kill zombies.

- ✓ The actor (the noun who taught the children) is missing. *The word “taught” is an irregular past participle.

Passive: The children were taught to kill zombies by the police officers.

- ✓ The actor (the police officers) is at the end of the sentence. *The word “taught” is an irregular past participle. The direct object (the children) is in the subject position.

Active: The police officers taught the children to kill zombies.

- ✓ The actor (police officers) is added to the subject position, and the object (the children) is receiving the action of the verb (taught). The “be” verb is eliminated.

Passive: The zombies were defeated.

- ✓ The actors who defeated the zombies are missing from the sentence.

Passive: The zombies were defeated by the police officers.

- ✓ The actor (the police officers) is at the end of the sentence. The direct object (zombies) is in the subject position, and the object (the police officers) is receiving the action of the verb (defeated) instead of the subject (zombies).

Active: The police officers defeated the zombies.

- ✓ See how the active sentence structure is more exact? It provides meaningful information that was missing or is more direct than the sentence was in passive structure.

***Common Irregular (they don’t end in -ed!) Part Participles**

beaten	begun	been	blown
broken	brough	built	burst
bought	caught	chosen	come
cost	cut	dealt	done
drawn	drunk	driven	eaten
fallen	fed	felt	fought
found	flown	forgotten	frozen
gotten	given	grown	hung
heard	hidden	hit	held
known	laid	led	lain
lost	made	meant	met
paid	put	read	ridden
said	seen	sold	sent
set	shaken	stolen	shone
shot	shut	shown	sung
sat	spoken	spent	stood
stuck	swung	taken	taught
torn	told	thought	thrown
understood	withdrawn	woken	worn
won	wound	written	woven

