
Active Sentence Structure

Write Site handout

Using active, instead of passive, verbs makes writing more powerful and immediate. Things happen instead of being talked about, so the writing moves more quickly and feels more exciting to the reader. 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

But, a “be” verb by itself doesn’t 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 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: usually ending in –ed, -d, -t, en, or –n

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) 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 it. Sometimes, you may need to add an actor to the sentence.

Examples

Passive: The metropolis was terrorizeded.

*The actor (person who terrorized) is missing.

Passive: The metropolis was terrorizeded by hordes of zombies.

*The actor (hordes of zombies) is at the end of the sentence.

Active: Hordes of zombies terrorized the metropolis.

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

Passive: The zombies were defeateded while many police officers were on vacation.

* The actors who defeated the zombies are missing from the sentence.

Active: Some of the police officers defeated the zombies while many other police officers vacationed.

* The actor (some of the police officers) has to be added to the sentence’s subject position, and the object (the zombies) is receiving the action of the verb (defeated). The “be” verb is eliminated.

*See how the active sentence structure is more exact? It provides meaningful information that was missing when the sentence was in passive structure.

Remember that passive voice is not grammatically incorrect. It’s a stylistic concern because passive sentences often lack clarity—the actor who is performing the action of the verb. In some instances passive voice might be appropriate. If you don’t know who performs the action of the verb or you want to emphasize the direct object (the noun that receives the action of the verb), then passive voice might be an appropriate choice.



USE STYLES TO EASILY FORMAT YOUR
WORD DOCUMENTS IN NO TIME.

Hours

Website

Subtitle

HEADING 3

STREET ADDRESS, CITY, ST ZIP CODE

Telephone

Subtitle

HEADING 8

STREET ADDRESS, CITY, ST ZIP CODE

Telephone

HEADING 7

HEADING 2

HEADING 9

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

USE STYLES TO EASILY FORMAT YOUR
WORD DOCUMENTS IN NO TIME.

HEADING 7

HEADING 2

HEADING 9

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

ON THE HOME TAB OF THE RIBBON,
CHECK OUT STYLES

HEADING 7

HEADING 2

HEADING 9

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

HEADING 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

FIND EVEN MORE EASY-TO-USE TOOLS
ON THE INSERT TAB

Telephone

STREET ADDRESS, CITY, ST ZIP CODE
WEBSITE

WEBSITE