

Writing Center

Active and Passive Voice

The concept of *voice* involves the relationship between a subject and verb. *Voice* applies only to certain verbs known as transitive or action verbs.

Active Voice

In the active *voice* of transitive verbs (verbs that take a direct object), the subject (S) performs the action and the direct object (DO) receives the action.

- S V DO
▪ Sam **buys** gum.

- S V DO
▪ Lou **wore** blue shoes.

- S V DO
▪ Somebody **robbed** the bank

- S V DO
▪ Clerks **stock** the shelves daily.

Passive Voice

In the *passive voice*, the subject does not perform the action of the verb but receives the action. The performer of the action is placed in a prepositional phrase or is absent from the sentence.

- S V PREP PHRASE
▪ Gum **is bought** by Sam.

- S V PREP PHRASE
▪ Blue shoes **were worn** by Lou.

- S V
▪ The bank **was robbed**.

- S B
▪ The shelves **are stocked** daily.

Readers and writers often prefer the active voice because it is more direct, more emphatic, and more concise than the passive voice. Sometimes, however, the passive voice is preferable if the performer is unknown or is less important than the recipient of the action.

- S V
- The bank **was robbed**.

(Passive because the identity of the robbers is unknown.)

- S V
- The shelves **are stocked** daily.

(Passive because the performer of the action is unimportant.)

- S V PREP PHRASE
- The priceless porcelain statue **was broken** by Kelly.

(Passive because the recipient of the action is more important than the performer.)

To form the active voice of a passive verb, place the main verb in the same tense as the verb *to be* from the passive form. Change the subject to the direct. To form the passive voice of an active verb, use the correct tense of the verb *to be* plus the past participle of the main verb.

Verb Tense	Active Voice	Passive Voice
Present	Lou <i>wears</i> boots.	Boots <i>are worn</i> by Lou.
Past	My friend <i>borrowed</i> my car.	My car <i>was borrowed</i> by my friend.
Future	The children <i>will share</i> the pizza.	The pizza <i>will be shared</i> by the children.
Present Perfect	The butler <i>has polished</i> the silverware.	The silverware <i>has been polished</i> by the butler.
Past Perfect	Pat <i>had sailed</i> the boat many times.	The boat <i>has been sailed</i> many times by pat.
Future Perfect	I <i>will have eaten</i> my lunch by noon today.	My lunch <i>will have been eaten</i> by noon today.