



## Active vs Passive Voice

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The voice of our sentences can help give our audience a better idea of whether the subject is receiving or performing the action of our verbs. Voice can also be used to either clearly or vaguely demonstrate blame or responsibility. Depending on your rhetorical goals in your writing, you may want to use active voice over passive voice or vice-versa.

### Active Voice

Active voice emphasizes the subject who performs the action. There should be a clear actor and receiver of the action.

Ex: Her group presented the project in class.

[actor]   [verb]   [receiver]

### Passive Voice

Passive voice emphasizes the receiver of the action. Often times, the verb form of passive voice includes a “to be” verb. If you want to make clear who the actor of the action is, “by” will often precede the actor. However, there will be times when you want to make the actor ambiguous.

Ex: The security file was deleted by the new intern.

[receiver]   [to be verb]   [actor]

The security file was deleted.

[receiver]   [to be verb]

Notice how in the second sentence above, it’s not clear who actually deleted the file.

### Deciding on Active Voice

Active voice is ideal when you want to connect with the reader. Active voice engages the reader more effectively than passive voice thanks to its language being a bit stronger.

Active Voice: The accountant stole money from the company.

Passive Voice: Money was stolen from the company.

Active voice lends itself to clearer language because it’s more direct and clearly shows who is doing what to whom.

Active Voice: The telemarketers started their strike two days ago.

Passive Voice: The strike was started two days ago.

Active voice is ideal when you want to show that someone was responsible for something.

Active Voice: I made several mistakes.

Passive Voice: Several mistakes were made.

## **Deciding on Passive Voice**

When completing any business communication, it's best to use passive voice sparingly. However, there will be times where it will be more preferred and affective. Because the actor of an action doesn't need to be explicitly stated in passive voice, you can use passive voice when you want to convey your message without blaming or placing responsibility on the audience.

Passive Voice: The report was never submitted.

Active Voice: You never submitted the report.

Passive Voice: The operation was performed on the wrong side of the patient.

Active Voice: The surgeon performed the operation on the wrong side of the patient.

Passive voice works well when you want to emphasize the receiver over the actor of an action.

Passive Voice: The president was elected.

The president was elected by the voters.

Active Voice: The voters elected the president.

Passive Voice: The report was submitted just before the deadline.

The report was submitted just before the deadline by Kevin.

Active Voice: Kevin submitted the report just before the deadline.

Passive voice can be used when the actor of the action is unknown.

Passive Voice: The fire alarm was pulled.

The fire alarm was pulled by someone.

Active Voice: Someone pulled the fire alarm.