

PASSIVE VS. ACTIVE VOICE

The difference between active and passive voice is centered on the subject and verb of a sentence. When the subject is performing the verb (the action), that is active voice. When the verb is performed *upon* the subject, that is passive voice.

For example:

Passive: The door was opened by zombies.

Active: Zombies opened the door.

“Zombies” are the sentence subject, “open” is the action, “door” is the object

Passive: The course will be taught by an expert in English literature.

Active: An English literature expert will teach the course.

“Expert” is the subject, “teach” is the action, “course” is the object

Generally, you want to avoid passive voice because it can lead to clunky, awkward sentences and can sound dull and uninteresting. However, there are exceptions. An indirect expression can be an effective rhetorical tool in certain instances, such as when you want to emphasize the action that is being performed, rather than the subject (e.g., “The full moon *can best be seen* on a clear night.”).

Tips to quickly recognize active vs. passive voice:

- Active voice tends to be more concise than passive voice.
- If the subject appears in the phrase “by the...,” it’s passive voice.
- If the verb is a form of “be” (am, is, was, were, are, been), check for passive voice. The presence of a “be” verb doesn’t necessarily mean the sentence is passive (you still need to examine the sentence structure to be sure), but often it’s a good indicator.

Related Resources:

[Active and Passive Voice](#)
Purdue Online Writing Lab

[A Lesson in Writing Concisely](#)
Purdue Online Writing Lab

[Quick and Dirty Tips: Active Voice Versus Passive Voice,](#)
Mignon Fogarty (“Grammar Girl”)

[Active Voice vs. Passive Voice,](#)
Grammarist

[Active and Passive Voice,](#)
Jerz's Literary Weblog



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