

PASSIVE VOICE

Keep the reader's attention

In the active voice, the subject of the sentence typically does the action, whereas in the passive voice, the subject most often receives the action. (The object can become the subject.) Active verbs are vigorous and emphatic; they keep the reader alive (and reading!). Passive voice lulls the reader to sleep.

Example (**Passive**): The World Series was won by the Boston Red Sox in four straight games.

Better Example (**Active**): The Boston Red Sox trounced the Yankees in four straight games.

Emphasize the actor

Active sentences emphasize the actor (in this case the Boston Red Sox). Passive sentences do not prioritize the actor and often use or imply a phrase beginning with "by," as in "by the Boston Red Sox." Sometimes the actor disappears altogether.

Example (**Passive**): The World Series was won in four straight games.

Write forcefully

The active voice is generally more forceful and effective.

Example (**Passive**): The implications of Yasir Arafat's death were debated in class.

Better Example (**Active**): The class debated the implications of Yasir Arafat's death.

Avoid mind numbing language

Government and official documents thrive on passive voice. Don't fall into this trap.

Example (**Passive**): It is determined that the committee will be dissolved in March.

Better Example (**Active**): The committee will dissolve in March.

Choose passive voice when appropriate

The passive voice is appropriate when the actor is unknown, when you want to minimize the actor's significance, or when you want to emphasize the receiver.

Example (**Passive**): The new variety of coca plant, which may have been genetically modified, is resistant to the herbicide glyphosate.

General rule: *Use an active verb unless you have a good reason for choosing a passive verb.*