The Writing Center Presents:

Passive Voice

Developed by Keith Evans

What is Passive Voice?

- In passive voice, the subject of the sentence receives the action of the verb rather than performing the action.
  - The fly was swatted by John.
- In active voice, the subject performs the verb.
  - John swatted the fly.
- While passive voice is not grammatically incorrect, it's a stylistic choice that you may wish to refrain from in most instances.

The Cons of Passive Voice

- Excessive use of passive voice can hurt the flow of your essay and may make some sentences confusing. It may hurt the clarity of your paper.
- Passive voice is considered “sloppy writing” or lazy thinking by some teachers.
- In Creative Writing and Communication based classes, passive voice is looked down upon. Passive Voice slows the reader down and makes your prose less interesting.

Pros of Passive Voice

- Passive voice places more emphasis on the object of a sentence.
  - As a result, this also removes emphasis from the subject or one performing the action in a sentence.
- Helps remove yourself from the paper, helping prevent personal bias.
  - Passive voice is used mainly in scientific writing to maintain objectivity.

Identifying Passive Voice

One of these sentences is Passive. Can you find out which one?

1. Frank went to the store.
2. Hannah bought milk.
3. Bob was stung by a wasp.
4. Mike ate a cookie.

Answers

1 Active: Frank is the subject and performs the action.

2 Active: Hannah buys the milk; she performs the action.

3 Passive: Bob is the subject and receives the action of being stung by the wasp.

4 Active: Bob is actively eating the cookie.

Hints in Identifying Passive Voice

Always check for the use of a past participle.

Any use of the verb "to be" coupled with a past participle results in passive voice.

Check if the subject (usually at the front of the sentence) is performing the action.

If the subject is not performing the verb action, but is receiving it, the sentence is passive.

Check for the use of "by."

Verb + by + Object = Passive Voice.

Changing to Active Voice

Revise these sentences into Active Voice.

- Mark was soaked by the sprinkler.
- John was bitten by a mosquito.
- Jane was growing bored from the book.
- The movie was bashed by several top film critics.

Revised Sentences

- The sprinkler soaked Mark.
- A mosquito bit John.
- The book was boring Jane.
- Several top film critics bashed the movie.

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