

Passive and Active Voice in Journalistic Writing

Active verbs will improve your writing:

- Since active verbs declare who or what is (or should be) performing the action, you avoid confusion, guesswork, or dodging responsibility.
- Active verbs make your writing flow more easily; readers will more quickly get to the ideas you want to convey.
- Sentences constructed in the active voice usually require fewer words; you constantly want to aim to write concisely.

How to identify passive voice:

-As a reader, if you can't identify the doer of the action, the sentence has likely been constructed in the passive voice.

-Even when the subject is clear, two clues can help you identify passive use: 1) the word "by" and 2) variations of the verb "to be."

Consider these sentences:

Passive: The juicy watermelon was eaten by the boy

Active: The boy chomped into the juicy watermelon

Passive: Employees are seen by their managers as responsive and enthusiastic.

Active: Managers see their employees as responsive and enthusiastic.

-In addition, passive verbs can foster weasel-like communication. They might be used to hide who's responsible for an action, thus evading accountability, rather than declaring it. For example, if a contract states "the rules for the homeowners will be encouraged" but doesn't note who will enforce those rules, what's the result? Ambiguity, confusion, and inaction. **Look at the poster on the next page published in 2019 by The Women's March in Sydney, Australia to see how passive voice gives men a pass for some of their behaviors.**

How to identify active voice:

The pattern for an active sentence is typically subject + verb + direct object. The direct object is the recipient of the action—that is, who or whom the verb affects.

Example: The employees (subject) implement (verb) the new strategy (object).

Assignment: On a separate sheet of paper, re-write the passive construction in the following sentence and rewrite it, making sure to use an active verb. Hint—you might need to make up a subject.

1. This policy is being implemented in an effort to streamline our processes.
2. Rules are not being followed in this school.
3. Mistakes were made in formulating the new schedule.
4. There is a considerable range of expertise demonstrated by the spam senders.
5. We were invited by our neighbors to attend their party.

men kill women

How many ~~women are killed by men~~
every year?

men rape women

How many ~~women are raped by men~~
every year?

men assault women

How many ~~women are assaulted by~~
~~men~~ every year?

Stop making the conversation
about violence against women
passive.



WOMEN'S
MARCH
-SYDNEY-