

In a sentence written in the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action. In a sentence written in the passive voice, the subject receives the action. The subject is the noun with the most emphasis; often placed at the beginning of a sentence/clause. Depending on the type of writing, you must decide if the active or passive voice will be more effective.

Active Voice

- The subject of the sentence is the one doing the action
- More commonly used than passive voice
- Creates more emphasis on the person doing the action
 - Ex. Sam ate the whole sandwich. (The verb “ate” is expressed in the active voice, since the subject “Sam” is the doer of the action)
 - Ex. My father cooked a delicious meal last weekend. (“My father” is doing the verb “cooked” right now)

When in doubt... If you are active, you are doing something. In a sentence written in active voice, the subject of the sentence is doing the verb. The person doing the action generally starts off the phrase.

Noun Doing Action + Verb + Noun Receiving Action

Passive Voice

- The subject of the sentence receives an action
- More often used in lab reports or mathematical expressions to help sharpen focus on the content of the reports instead of on the researcher
- Less emphasis on who is responsible for the action; less direct as a whole
 - Ex. 3 of these plants were taken indoors, away from the harsh weather (The object the action is done to is placed first and the verb comes second)
 - Ex. The whole sandwich was eaten by Sam. (The verb “eaten” is expressed in the passive voice; the target of the action “the whole sandwich” was placed first)
 - Ex. A delicious meal was cooked by my father last weekend. (“A delicious meal” is the subject and the verb “was cooked” comes second)

When in doubt... If you are passive, something is done to you. In a sentence written in passive voice, the subject of the sentence is having the action of the verb done to it by something else.

Noun Receiving Action + Verb + Noun Doing Action

Now that you have learned the difference between active and passive voice, decide whether each sentence is written in active or passive voice.

1. The lady played the piano.
2. The piano was played by the lady.
3. The driver drove the car.

4. The race car was driven by the driver.
5. Tim mailed the letter to his parents.
6. Four sandwiches were eaten by the family.
7. Harry ate six shrimp at dinner.
8. The obstacle course was run by Frank in record time.
9. My father read the novel in one day.
10. The car will be cleaned on Saturday.
11. My mother painted the living room.
12. The students' had their questions answered by their teacher.
13. Wilson donated money to the homeless shelter.
14. My car sales ad was not responded to by anyone.
15. All the reservations for the field trip will be made by the teacher.

Answer Key:

1. Active
2. Passive
3. Active
4. Passive
5. Active
6. Passive
7. Active
8. Passive
9. Active
10. Passive
11. Active
12. Passive
13. Active
14. Passive
15. Passive