

PASSIVE VOICE

Verbs are also said to be either *active* (The executive committee approved the new policy) or *passive* (The new policy was approved by the executive committee) in *voice*. **In the active voice**, the subject and verb relationship is straightforward: the subject is a be-er or a do-er and the verb moves the sentence along. **In the passive voice**, the subject of the sentence is neither a do-er or a be-er, but is acted upon by some other **agent** or by something unnamed (The new policy was approved).

The passive voice does exist for a reason, however, and its presence is not always to be despised. The passive is particularly useful (even recommended) in a few situations:

- *When it is more important to draw our attention to the person or thing acted upon:* The unidentified victim was apparently struck during the early morning hours.
- *When the actor in the situation is not important:* The aurora borealis can be observed in the early morning hours.
- *To avoid responsibility for actions taken:* “Cigarette ads were designed to appeal especially to children. ---As opposed to---- We design cigarette ads to appeal especially to children. (Where “we” is taking responsibility.)

The following chart shows the differences between Active and passive sentences in the principal tenses.

Active	Passive	Time Reference
They make Fords in Cologne.	Fords are made in Cologne.	Present Simple
Susan is cooking dinner.	Dinner is being cooked by Susan	Present Continuous
James Joyce wrote "Dubliners".	"Dubliners" was written by James Joyces.	Past Simple
They were painting the house when I arrived.	The house was being painted when I arrived.	Past Continuous
They have produced over 20 models in the past two years.	Over 20 models have been produced in the past two years.	Present Perfect
They are going to build a new factory in Portland.	A new factory is going to be built in Portland.	Future Intention with Going to
I will finish it tomorrow.	It will be finished tomorrow.	Future Simple

If you want to change a passive-voice sentence to active voice, find the agent in a "by the..." phrase, or consider carefully who or what is performing

the action expressed in the verb. Make that agent the subject of the sentence, and change the verb accordingly.

Passive Voice	Agent	Changed to Active Voice
<i>The book is being read by most of the class.</i>	most of the class	<i>Most of the class is reading the book.</i>
<i>Results will be published in the next issue of the journal.</i> by ?	agent not specified; most likely agents such as "the researchers"	<i>The researchers will publish their results in the next issue of the journal.</i>
<i>A policy of whitewashing and cover-up has been pursued by the CIA director and his close advisors.</i>	the CIA director and his close advisors	<i>The CIA director and his close advisors have pursued a policy of whitewashing and cover-up.</i>
<i>Mistakes were made.</i> by ?	agent not specified; most likely agents such as "we"	<i>We made mistakes.</i>

For additional work on revising passive sentences go to:
http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/passive_quiz.htm