ACTIVE VOICE VS. PASSIVE VOICE

The relationship between the subject and the verb determines the voice of a sentence. There are two different ways a sentence can be written:

 When a sentence is in <u>active voice</u>, the subject comes before the verb. In active voice, the subject does the action of the sentence.

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Example: Everyone at the party had fun.

S V

Example: Molly cashed her check at the bank.

2. When a sentence is in <u>passive voice</u>, the subject of the sentence is acted upon by some other agent. Passive voice often includes auxiliary verbs.

S V V

Example: Fun was had by everyone at the party.

S V V

Example: The check was cashed by Molly.

Rule: In academic essays, a writer should try to <u>use active voice</u> and <u>avoid</u> <u>using passive voice</u>.

TRANSFORMING PASSIVE SENTENCES TO ACTIVE SENTENCES:

Let's use the following example sentence to illustrate the process of changing a passive sentence to an active one:

The ice cream cones were eaten by the children.

You'll notice in the above sentence that the agent doing the action (the children) is not the subject of the sentence. Also, the sentence uses an auxiliary verb (were). These two clues tell you that the sentence is written in passive voice.

STEP 1: Make the agent doing the action the subject of the sentence.

PASSIVE: The ice cream cones were eaten by the children.

ACTIVE: **The children**...

STEP 2: Remove the auxiliary verb (to be verb) from the sentence. Change the past participle into the appropriate tense.

PASSIVE: The ice cream cones were eaten by the children.

ACTIVE: The children ate...

STEP 3: Make the subject of the passive sentence the receiver of the action to complete the change.

PASSIVE: The ice cream cones were eaten by the children.

ACTIVE: The children ate **the ice cream cones**.

CAUTION:

Avoid shifting from active to passive voice in the same sentence because it can cause awkwardness and confusion.

Incorrect: The children ate ice cream, but it was bought by Peter. (voice shifts)

Correct: The children ate ice cream, but Peter bought it. (voice consistent)

EXERCISE 1

CISE I				
the senten	ce in active voice in the s	space provided	•	
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This sentence is in	passive voice. The agent	t of the sentenc	e, the noun doing the act	tion is the
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	passive voice. The agent	t of the sentenc		
	the sentency write "ACTI S The position of pro This sentence is in personnel departn S An appointment worthis sentence is in	ions: Label the subject and verb in each the sentence in active voice in the swrite "ACTIVE" in the space provide S The position of program analyst has already This sentence is in passive voice. The agen personnel department, but it is not in the position of the posi	ions: Label the subject and verb in each sentence. Therefore the sentence in active voice in the space provided write "ACTIVE" in the space provided. S V V V The position of program analyst has already been filled by This sentence is in passive voice. The agent of the sentence personnel department, but it is not in the position of the subsequence	ions: Label the subject and verb in each sentence. Then, if the sentence is in pass the sentence in active voice in the space provided. If the sentence is alread write "ACTIVE" in the space provided.

3. The picket fence, which was repaired last week by Dad, was painted by Claire and Dave.

This sentence is in passive voice. The agent of the sentence, the nouns doing the action are Claire and Dave, but they are not in the position of the subject. This sentence MUST be rewritten.

4. First prize was won by Harriet for her one-act play.

This sentence is in passive voice. The agent of the sentence, the noun doing the action is Harriet, but she is not in the position of the subject. This sentence MUST be rewritten.

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5. The book fair, which was sponsored by the Friends of the Library Association, is held the first week in October.

This sentence is in passive voice. The agent of the sentence, the noun doing the action is the Friends of the Library Association, but it is not in the position of the subject. This sentence MUST be rewritten.

S V

6. Micky listened to her favorite song in the car on her way to school.

Active voice!

7. After the tent had been pitched by the campers, their sleeping bags and supplies were unpacked from the car.

This sentence is in passive voice. The agent of the sentence, the noun doing the action is the campers, but they are not in the position of the subject. This sentence MUST be rewritten.

S V V

8. The basketball, which was passed from McHale to Bird, was immediately dunked by Bird.

This sentence is in passive voice. The agent of the sentence, the noun doing the action is Bird, but he is not in the position of the subject. This sentence MUST be rewritten.

S V V

9. The parrot was let out of its cage by Tony, who was promptly chastised by Ms. Quincy, the owner. This sentence is in passive voice. The agent of the sentence, the noun doing the action is Tony, but he is not in the position of the subject. This sentence MUST be rewritten.

EXERCISE 2

Directions:

Use proof reading marks to change any sentence that is in passive voice to active voice. When you are finished, your revised paragraph should be in active voice.

In the summer of 1904, a camp was rented by my father on a lake in Maine. We were my father rented a camp on a lake in Maine.

taken there for the month of August. Ringworm was gotten from some kittens, and Pond's We went there for... Some kittens got ringworm, so we rubbed Pond's ...

Extract had to be rubbed on our arms and legs night and morning. Aside from the

ringworm, the vacation was thought to be a success. To this day, I still believe there is no

place on earth as wonderful as that lake in Maine. My family visited that lake summer after

summer. Recently, I bought a house on the ocean. The restlessness of the tides and the

fearful cold of the sea water in the afternoon and evening is soothing, but every summer I

still wish for the placidity of the lake in the woods. A few weeks ago, this feeling was

I experienced this ...

experienced by me so strongly that I bought a couple of bass hooks and a spinner and

drove up to the lake. After my weekend of fishing and relaxation, I felt like a kid again.