

# 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:

1. When a sentence is in **active voice**, the subject comes before the verb. **In active voice, the subject does the action of the sentence.**

Example:                   S                                   V  
Everyone at the party had fun.

Example:                   S                   V  
Molly cashed her check at the bank.

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

Example:                   S           V   V  
Fun was had by everyone at the party.

Example:                   S           V   V  
The check was cashed by Molly.

**Rule:** In academic essays, a writer should try to **use active voice** and **avoid using passive voice**.

## 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 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  
**I find the restlessness of...**

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.