

Help Centres – English Support



Active Versus Passive Voice

Active Voice: In sentences written in active voice, the subject performs the action of the verb, and the object receives the actions.

Example:

The cat scratched the dog.

William will present his research paper.

(The arrows show that the **subject** of the sentence is performing the action of the **verb** onto the **object**.)

Use and Structure:

1. Is used in academic and formal writing.
2. Makes your sentences sound clearer and more direct.
3. Uses the basic structure of *subject + verb + object* for active sentences

Passive Voice: In sentences written in passive voice, the subject receives the action of the verb. The subject and object of active sentences change places in passive sentences. The object may appear in a “by the...” phrase or may be omitted.

Example:

The dog was scratched by the cat.

The paper will be presented by William

(The arrows show that the **object** of the sentence is performing the action of the **verb** onto the **subject**.)

Use and Structure:

1. Is used to highlight that the thing receiving the action is the important part of the sentence.
2. Is used in scientific writing when the performer of an action is unknown or not so important.
3. Uses the structure of *subject + be-verb + past participle + object* for passive sentences

Practice:

A/ Change the following passive sentences into active sentences

Example:

- *The entrance exam was failed by over one-third of applicants to the school. [Passive]*
- *Over one-third of applicants to the school failed the entrance exam. [Active]*

1. My house was painted by my brother.
2. Victoria, BC is visited by thousands of tourists every year.
3. The kitten was carried by the mother cat in her mouth.
4. The students' questions are always answered by the teacher.
5. The story was being written by her.
6. Was the thief caught (by the police)?
7. The homework assignment was posted online (by the teacher).
8. I am loved by my family.

B/ Chang the following active sentences into passive sentences

1. Jason drew a beautiful portrait of my mother.
2. The scientist presented an article on the experiment.
3. The dog ate all of the food in the bowl.
4. My daughter wrote an exciting story about mythical fairies.
5. Rose cleans the office every Saturday.
6. The fire destroyed the movie theatre.
7. The teacher appreciated the student's hard work.
8. She sent the report yesterday.

Adapted from:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/active_and_passive_voice/active_versus_passive_voice.html