**Passive and Active Voice**

The voice of the verb shows whether the grammatical subject performs the action or is acted upon. A careful writer chooses active voice over passive voice whenever possible. Because active voice expresses a direct statement, it is preferred.

* ACTIVE VOICE --The police officer (doer of the action) stopped the red car (receiver of the action).
* PASSIVE VOICE--The red car (receiver of the action) was stopped by the police officer (doer of the action).

Notice that the active voice sentence places the “doer” of the action in the grammatical subject slot and the “receiver” of the action (that which is being acted upon) is placed in the object slot. The passive voice is just the opposite. The “receiver” of the action is in the subject slot, and the “doer” of the action is placed in the object slot. A *be* verb is also added. (HINT: If a *be* verb is NOT followed by an *-ing* verb, the sentence is passive.)

* ACTIVE VOICE--John (doer in subject slot) read the entire novel (receiver in object slot).
* PASSIVE VOICE--The entire novel (receiver in subject slot) was read by John (doer in the object slot).

In the active voice sentence, the original “doer” is John. John is in the subject slot. In the passive voice sentence, the “doer” of the sentence, John, is placed in the object slot by using *by*. The original “doer” becomes the object of the preposition *by*. The grammatical subject of the passive voice sentence, novel, is the original object of the active verb read.

Although active voice is preferred, there are a few instances when the use of passive voice is acceptable:

* If the receiver or the action needs to be emphasized more than the doer of the action, passive voice is acceptable.
* Example: The woman was killed by a truck. The woman needs to be emphasized more than the truck.
* If the doer of the action is unknown or unimportant, passive voice is acceptable.
* Example: The car I wanted was bought yesterday (by. . .). The buyer (doer) or the car is unimportant. The fact that the car was bought is important.
* Example: The clerk at the Around-the-Clock Food Store was abducted.
* Example: No names or phone numbers were ever provided.
* Example: The speed limit on interstate highways has been increased.

Avoid awkward use of the passive voice:

* My abilities have been noted by my peers and proven in many instances.

Do not shift from active to passive voice within a passage:

* I went through five different majors when I was in college. Each major was chosen quickly, without proper time for judgment.
* My husband and I recently bought a new home. We purchased it through a very reliable real estate agency, which we also chose as the rental agency for our old home. Once the realtor initiated the rental process, the lease agreement was reviewed in detail and the security deposit, along with information about refunds, was outlined. Deposits were made; agreements were signed and notarized; and the property was rented.

Remember: In formal writing, active voice is preferred. However, when the "doer" of the action is unknown or irrelevant, passive voice may be used.

* Passive: We were seated on the front row. (Doer unknown)
* Active: The usher seated us on the front row.
* Passive: Your call will be answered in the order in which it was received (Doer irrelevant)
* Active: An operator will answer your call in the order in which we received it.
* Passive: Prizes will be awarded to the winners.
* Passive: The winners will be given prizes.
* Active: The judges will award prizes to the winners.

In this formula, the tense is found in the *be* verb, and the *-en*form is found on the main verb:

* Past Tense + BE + -en + Verb

Example: For the verb *help*, (past tense + BE = was;) (-en + help = helped). Thus, the passive voice is *was helped*.