



Active vs. Passive Voice

The Difference

In active voice, the **agent** (who or whatever is performing the action described) is the subject of the sentence and appears first. In passive voice, the **action, object, or occurrence** appears first, and the agent follows the verb, usually indicated by a prepositional phrase beginning with “by . . .”

For most writing, active voice is the preferred form. But if you want to emphasize the action as the subject of the sentence, rather than the agent, use passive voice. (This use is most common in scientific writing.)

If you want to change a passive-voice sentence to active voice, find the agent in a “by...” phrase. Make that agent the subject of the sentence, and change the verb accordingly.

If you want to change an active-voice sentence to passive voice, make the agent the object of a “by . . .” phrase. Make what is acted upon the subject of the sentence, and change the verb to a form of be + past participle.

Changing Passive to Active Voice

The book *is being read by*
most of the class.



Most of the class *is reading*
the book.

Mistakes *were made.*



We *made* mistakes.

Changing Active to Passive Voice

Scientists *have discovered*
traces of ice on the
surface of Mars.



Traces of ice *have been*
discovered by scientists
on the surface of Mars.