

Verbs: Active and Passive Voice

1. **Active:** If the subject of a sentence performs the action named by the verb or is in the condition named by the verb, the verb is said to be in the active voice. It may or may not have a direct object.

Examples: The dog bit the mailman.
 S V DO
 The nuclear bomb exploded.
 S V
 Merlin used a spell to put evil people to sleep.
 S V DO
 This exercise is difficult.
 S V

2. **Passive:** If the subject receives the action of the verb, the verb is said to be in the passive voice. The passive is formed by using a form of the verb *to be* (*is, am, are, were, was, or been*) and the past participle of the main verb.

Examples: The clouds were blown away before dawn.
 S V
 The house is being built for a family of four.
 S V

(Note: Writers are advised to choose the active voice because active sentences are usually more direct, emphatic, and concise than the passive ones. But if a writer does not know the doer of an act or if the doer is not important, the passive voice is a logical choice. For example, in the passive sentence “Writers are advised to choose the active voice”, the subject *writer* is more important than the unknown someone who does the advising.)

Practice by labeling these sentences passive or active. If you feel that the passive sentence is awkward, change it to an active one.

1. ____ That essay was not written by me.
2. ____ Marie prefers writing poetry instead of plays.
3. ____ Her writing has been criticized in recent literary magazines.
4. ____ Our committee met and approved of the Halloween party.
5. ____ That we should wear costumes was agreed upon by all of the club members.
6. ____ It is assumed by some economist that a balanced budget is essential for good government.
7. ____ The old Tenth Street Bridge has been damaged many times.
8. ____ Citizens voted to replace the old bridge with a new, two-lane structure.
9. ____ Each spring children are told again and again to stay off the thin ice.
10. ____ Biologists claim that the whooping crane is in danger of extinction.
11. ____ That this is a serious matter is my belief.