

Verbs: Passive/Active Voice

Verbs are either *active* or *passive*. If the subject of the sentence performs the action, the verb is in *active voice*.

The student wrote the essay.

The student performs the action of writing, so the verb is in active voice.

If the subject of the sentence receives the action, the verb is in *passive voice*, and the performer of the action is found in a “by” phrase.

The essay was written by the student.

In this sentence, the subject receives the action of being written, so the verb is in passive voice.

Active voice is usually more effective than passive voice because sentences written in active voice are less wordy and more direct. Passive voice can also be confusing when the performer of the action is not specified. For example:

The essay was left in the instructor’s mailbox.

In this sentence, it is not clear who left the essay. To change this sentence into active voice, you would have to add a subject, providing you know who the subject is.

Toby left the essay in the instructor’s mailbox.

Some form of the verb *to be*, such as *was*, *has*, *is being*, *will be* often precedes the main verb in a passive-voice sentence. When you edit a sentence by changing the passive voice to active, you get rid of the extra *to be* verbs that precede the main verb and any other words that do not fit the new sentence.

**Ryan’s hair was cut by Nina (passive)
Nina cut Ryan’s hair. (active)**

The active-voice sentence leaves out the extra verb *was* and the word *by*.

Practice: Trim and tighten the following sentences by finding and changing passive voice to active. Answers are at the bottom of page 2.

1. The concert was performed admirably by the university orchestra.

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2. Pepper, the talking parrot, is being trained by Mike.

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3. The writing contest was judged by a panel of teachers.
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4. Your prize will be sent by us next week.

5. Joe was told by his doctor to quit smoking.

6. The dog is walked daily by Bob.

7. Traffic is being delayed on U.S. 1 and Midway Road by an overturned semi.

8. The contract should be signed by both parents.

9. The computer lab was opened by Stan at 8:00 AM.

10. A new history test will be given by Dr. Smith next week.

- Answers
1. The university orchestra performed the concert admirably.
 2. Mike is training Pepper, the talking parrot.
 3. A panel of teachers judged the writing contest.
 4. We will send you your prize next week.
 5. Joe's doctor told him to quit smoking.
 6. Bob walks the dog daily.
 7. An overturned semi is delaying traffic on U.S. 1 and Midway Road.
 8. Both parents should sign the contract.
 9. At 8:00 AM Stan opened the computer lab.
 10. Dr. Smith will give a new history test next week.