

A QUICK GUIDE TO ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE VOICE

Active:

The student completed his first year of college with very good grades.

Here the subject of "*the student*" comes first, followed by the single verb "*completed*," and, finally, the object, which is "*his first year of college*."

What is Active Voice?

Active voice is the grammar structure in which the **subject comes before the object** in the sentence and shows a direct action on the object in the sentence. Active voice is preferred in most writing.

Passive:

The first year of college was completed by the student with very good grades.

Here, the object of "*the first year of college*" comes first, followed by **two verbs** "*was completed*," and, finally, the **subject**, which is "*the student*." Notice how "*with very good grades*" is ambiguous. Did the student get good grades in his first year of college, or has the student always earned good grades? In other words, it is not clear if "*with very good grades*" describes "*the first year of college*" or if it describes "*the student*."

What is Passive Voice?

Passive voice is the grammar structure in which **the object comes before the subject in the sentence**, thus making the action indirect.

You can usually recognize passive voice by the two verbs that need to be used to show past action. This tends to make sentences in passive voice less concise.

Some inexperienced writers think this is a good thing, since some formal writing is not concise; however, passive voice is only preferred in writing where the attention should be on the object, not on the subject who has performed the action.

Passive voice is tricky because it can lead to ambiguity in the meaning of the sentences.



Further information about this and other great resources for a more precise and in-depth explanation of this topic:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/01/>
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