

Active/Passive Voice Verbs

Voice tells whether a subject is acting (*She likes him*) or being acted upon (*She is liked*). Unless you have a reason not to, use the active voice; in other words, make sure the verb is active then the subject of the sentence will do the acting. The verb is passive if the subject is acted upon.

Active sentences are strong; active writing is interesting. Passive sentences often sound stuffy or awkward.

PASSIVE: Our huge oak tree was uprooted by the tornado.

ACTIVE: The tornado uprooted our huge old oak tree.

All passives have the following form:

- ▶ *...is given*
- ▶ *...was mailed*
- ▶ *...will be thrown*
- ▶ *...were annihilated*
- ▶ *...has been seen*
- ▶ *...have been finished*
- ▶ *...was taught*

All passives consist of a form of the verb "to be" (am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been) followed by a past participle (usually ending in -ed, -en, or -t).

A passive can also have an intervening adverb:

- ▶ *...is quickly given*
- ▶ *...was not mailed*
- ▶ *...will be unusually thrown*
- ▶ *...were totally annihilated*
- ▶ *...have rarely been finished*

The passive sentence sometimes contains the phrase "by..." The rest of the phrase by... tells who performed the action.

PASSIVE: The law was passed by the Senate.

ACTIVE: The Senate passed the law.

To change a sentence from the passive voice to active voice, make the performer of the action the subject of the sentence.

PASSIVE: It is believed by the plumber that a new drain is needed for the dishwasher.

ACTIVE: *The plumber* believes that the dishwasher needs a new drain.

Simple Rule: **When in doubt, get the passive out.**