

Active Voice

In the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action or being expressed by the verb.

The active voice can be in any verb tense - present, past, or future.

Example: Sally plays soccer on a team at her school.

The verb is plays. The subject, Sally, is performing the action.

Example: Tomorrow, Bob will move to another city.

The verb is will move. The subject, Bob, is performing the action.

Example: Last night, we ate breakfast for dinner.

The verb is ate. The subject, we, is performing the action.

Passive Voice

In the passive voice, the action of the verb is performed upon the subject of the sentence. Essentially, the noun that would normally be the object becomes the subject.

Sometimes the “doer” of the action is included, and sometimes it is not. Often a clue would be a phrase that begins with “by...” that comes after the verb.

Almost always, the passive voice includes a form of the verb “to be” as a helping verb.

The passive voice can be in any verb tense - present, past, or future.

Example: The new employees are hired by the store manager.

The verb is are hired. The subject, employees, is who received the action. *The store manager* performed the action.

Example: On Friday, our school will be dismissed early.

The verb is will be dismissed. The subject, school, is what received the action. The “doer” of the action is not known.

Example: After dinner last night, the dishes were washed by Larry.

The verb is were washed. The subject, dishes is what received the action. *Larry* performed the action.

More examples – the same sentence in both Active and Passive voice:

The new chef at the restaurant will cook our meal. (Active Voice)

Our meal will be cooked by the new chef at the restaurant. (Passive Voice)

I washed my uniform yesterday; therefore, I could wear it today. (Active Voice)

My uniform was washed yesterday; therefore, it could be worn today. (Passive Voice)

The seventh grade class reads *The Outsiders* every year. (Active Voice)

The Outsiders is read every year by the seventh grade class. (Passive Voice)

Helpful steps to change a sentence from the active to passive voice:

1. Make the direct object the subject
2. Give the new verb a helping verb (form of the verb “to be”); be sure to keep the same tense (present, past, or future)
3. The original subject becomes a prepositional phrase, if necessary.

Natalie reads a book to James. (Active voice – the subject (Natalie) is the one who is reading the book; the direct object (book) is receiving the action; it is the thing that is being read)

A book is read to James by Natalie. (Passive voice – the subject (book) is NOT doing the action of reading. It is actually receiving the action; it is the thing that is being read. It was the direct object in the original sentence.)

*Note how the verbs in both sentences are in the PRESENT TENSE

We will complete our homework today. (Active Voice – the subject (we) is doing the action, and the direct object (homework) receives the action)

Our homework will be completed today. (Passive voice – the subject is receiving the action of being completed)

*Note how the verbs in both sentences are in the FUTURE TENSE

Our neighbors planted a tree in their backyard. (Active voice – the subject (neighbor) is doing the action, and the direct object (tree) receives the action)

A tree was planted by our neighbors in their backyard. (Passive voice – the subject is receiving the action of being planted)

*Note how the verbs in both sentences are in the PAST TENSE