

PASSIVE VOICE

- I. **Passive voice** is a grammatical construction that places the object of the sentence before the verb. A sentence written in passive voice shifts the focus from the subject doing the action to the recipient of the action. Sentences in passive voice may be less clear, direct, and concise. While many disciplines prefer active voice, some encourage passive voice to de-emphasize the subject and/or place emphasis on the object (for example, some STEM disciplines).
- II. **Problems with using Passive Voice:** *Passive voice removes agency and responsibility from the individual carrying out the action.* This distinction is particularly important when discussing power dynamics (e.g. race, gender, political, or economic inequalities).
- III. **How to Spot Passive Voice:** Not every use of a “to be” verb is passive voice. A passive voice sentence generally goes like this: [object of the action] + [to be verb] + [past tense main verb]. If you can add “by zombies” to the end of your sentence and it still makes sense, it is likely in passive voice. For instance, “The pizza was eaten” still works when you add “The pizza was eaten by zombies.” So, this sentence is written in passive voice.
- IV. **How to Change Passive Voice:** Identify the subject of the sentence and put it first: [subject] + [main verb] + [object]. That changes the previous sentence into: “Zombies ate the pizza.”
- V. **Examples You Might Find in your Papers:**

Passive Voice: A number of things can be seen in these results.

Active Voice: We can see a number of things in these results.

Stronger Alternative: These results reveal numerous findings.

Passive Voice: The emission of greenhouse gasses from various human activities, like burning fossil fuels and deforestation, is widely understood to be the primary cause of climate change.

Active Voice: The emission of greenhouse gasses from various human activities, such as burning fossil fuels and deforestation, is the primary cause of climate change.

Stronger Alternative: The primary cause of climate change is the emission of greenhouse gasses from various human activities such as burning fossil fuels and deforestation.

Passive Voice: The new Constitution was supported by Thomas Jefferson, as documented in a letter to James Madison wherein its formational principles were elucidated and potential impact on the nascent nation was discussed.

Active Voice: A letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison provides evidence of Jefferson’s backing of the new Constitution and delves into his reflections on its underlying principles and potential repercussions for a developing nation.

Stronger Alternative: A letter to James Madison documents Thomas Jefferson’s support of the new Constitution. It also discusses his thoughts on the Constitution's underlying principles as well as its potential repercussions for the developing nation.

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