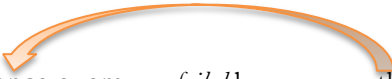


PASSIVE VS. ACTIVE VOICE

Passive Voice: the subject receives the action
-uses a form of the verb 'to be' and a past participle verb
-can make the sentence wordy and confusing


The entrance exam *was failed* by over one-third of the applicants to the school.


The brakes *were slammed* on by her as the car sped downhill.


by ? (agent omitted)


Your bicycle *has been damaged*.


Action on the bill *is being considered* by the committee.



By then, **the soundtrack** *will have been completely remixed* by the sound engineers.


Active Voice: the subject performs the action
-uses a direct verb
-creates clearer, more direct, and more powerful sentences


Over one-third of the applicants to the school *failed* the entrance exam.


She *slammed* on the brakes as the car sped downhill.


I *have damaged* your bicycle.


The committee *is considering* action on the bill.


By then, **the sound engineers** *will have completely remixed* the soundtrack.

**** Active voice is almost always best for academic writing ****

Recognizing Passive Voice

- the verb phrase will always include a form of be, such as **am, is, was, were, are, or been**
*a be-verb does not necessarily mean that the sentence is in passive voice
- may include a "by the..." phrase after the verb (e.g. "by the sound engineers" as in the last example above)
- the agent performing the action, if named, is the object of the preposition in this phrase

Changing from Passive to Active

1. consider carefully who or what (the agent) is performing the action expressed in the verb
*sometimes you will need to infer the agent from the context
2. make that agent the subject of the sentence
3. change the verb accordingly

When to Use Passive Voice

There are sometimes good reasons to use the passive voice.

To emphasize the action rather than the actor

After long debate, **the proposal** *was endorsed* by the long-range planning committee.

To keep the subject and focus consistent throughout a passage

The data processing department recently presented what proved to be a controversial proposal to expand its staff. After long debate, **the proposal** *was endorsed* by

To be tactful by not naming the actor

The procedures *were* somehow *misinterpreted*.

To describe a condition in which the actor is unknown or unimportant

Every year, **thousands of people** *are diagnosed* as having cancer.

To create an authoritative tone

Visitors *are not allowed* after 9:00 p.m.

To be more objective

The test tubes *were inoculated* at 37 degrees Celsius.

**Passive voice can be especially useful in scientific writing as it places focus on the experiment rather than the person performing it.