

Writing Guide: **Active and Passive Voice**

In an **active voice** sentence, **the subject performs the action.**

Active voice: **The girl kicked the ball.**

In this sentence, the subject, *the girl*, performs the action.

In a **passive voice** sentence, **the subject receives the action.**

Passive voice: **The ball was kicked by the girl.**

In this sentence, the subject, *the ball*, receives the action.

We **generally prefer active voice to passive voice.**

1. Active voice requires fewer words.
2. Active voice reduces the number of “be” verbs a writer uses: *am, is, are, was, and were*. These “be” verbs convey no action, and too many of them make a piece of writing lifeless.
3. Active voice provides more energy in a piece of writing.

Here are some examples.

Active: The instructor will calculate the final grades.

Passive: The final grades will be calculated by the instructor

Active: The retirees are playing bingo.

Passive: Bingo is being played by the retirees.

Active: A chef designs the menu.

Passive: The menu is designed by a chef.

Here are a few things to say **in defense of passive voice.**

1. Passive voice is grammatical.
2. Passive voice is a good choice if the writer wants to suggest the passivity of the subject.

Ex.: The islanders’ bungalows were battered by the hurricane.

Passive voice is also a good choice if the writer doesn’t want to reveal (or doesn’t know) who has performed an action.

Ex.: The decision has been made to raise tuition.