

Active and Passive Voice

Active Verbs

“Active verbs express meaning more emphatically and vigorously than their weaker counterparts—forms of the verb *be* or verbs in the passive voice. Verbs in the passive voice lack strength because their subjects receive the action instead of doing it.”

Active Voice: The subject of the sentence does the action.

“Hernando *caught* the fly ball.”

Passive Voice: The subject receives the action.

“The fly ball *was caught* by Hernando.”

Use the active voice unless you have a good reason for choosing the passive.

“In most cases, you will want to emphasize the actor, so you should use the active voice. To replace a passive verb with an active alternative, make the actor the subject of the sentence.”

Example:

Original (passive): “The transformer was struck by lightning, plunging us into darkness.”

Revised (active): “Lightning struck the transformer, plunging us into darkness.”

“The active verb (*struck*) makes the point more forcefully than the passive verb (*was struck*).”

“The passive voice is appropriate if you wish to emphasize the receiver of the action or to minimize the importance of the actor.”

Appropriate use of the passive voice:

“The solution *was heated* to the boiling point, and then it was reduced in volume by 50 percent.” (The writer wished to emphasize the solution and the experiment rather than the person who heated it.)

“Many native Hawaiians *are forced* to leave their beautiful beaches to make room for hotels and condominiums.” (The writer wished to emphasize the receivers of the action, the Hawaiians.)

“As the time for harvest approaches, the tobacco plants *are sprayed* with a chemical to retard the growth of suckers.” (The writer wished to focus on the tobacco plants, not on the people spraying them.)

The passive voice is useful in APA works when you must avoid masculine or feminine pronouns.