ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Both active and passive voice are used in academic writing. There is a trend away from using the passive at present but in some science disciplines its use is still encouraged. (Notice the use of the passive above.)

Active voice
In the active voice the subject of the sentence performs the action, e.g.

- The student asked the lecturer for help.

Passive voice
The passive is used for a number of reasons,

- if the doer of the action is not known, e.g. My laptop was stolen from the library.

or

- is unimportant, e.g. The play was written a long time ago.

Form of passive verbs
Passive verbs are formed using the appropriate tense of the verb ‘to be’ + the past participle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense ‘to be’</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>is/are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>was/were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present perfect</td>
<td>has/have been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>will be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Past participles often have the same form as the past tense, i.e. they usually end in ‘ed’ e.g. ‘studied’, ‘experimented’, ‘argued’.

However, in English there are plenty of regular verbs, e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past tense</th>
<th>Past participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ran</td>
<td>run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chose</td>
<td>chosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made</td>
<td>made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knew</td>
<td>known</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sentences using the passive

- The site was chosen because it was very fertile.

- The decision about the site has been made already.

- The site is not known by many people.

- The event will be run again this year.

If you find you have written a passive sentence and you want to change it to active, you probably can. See below.

Compare the verbs

- Lists of irregular verbs can be found on Google. (This sentence is passive.)

- You can find lists of irregular verbs on Google. (This sentence is active.)

Notice you need to insert the subject ‘You’ in the active sentence.
Compare the verbs
1. *Data from developing countries* is not often *published* in *English language journals.* (This sentence is present tense and *passive*)

2. *English language journals* do not often *publish* *data from developing countries.* (This sentence is present tense and *active*)

3. *An emphasis on scholarly activities* was *perceived by the lecturer.* (This sentence is past tense and passive.)

4. *The lecturer* perceived *an emphasis on scholarly activities.* (This sentence is past tense and active.)

Science writing
It is common to use the passive in technical and scientific writing, particularly in the Methods and Results sections.

Authors use the passive if they want to convey an impersonal tone or the person who did the action is not important, e.g.
- The vials were filled with the solution. (Past tense, passive)
- The samples will be checked at two hourly intervals. (Future tense, passive)
- Barium has been mapped extensively in the world’s oceans. (Present perfect tense, passive)

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