

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.

Active voice makes your writing

- clear ✓
- concise ✓
- direct ✓

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.

Tense 'to be'	Form
Present	is/are
Past	was/were
Present perfect	has/have been
Future	will be

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

Past tense	Past participle
ran	run
chose	chosen
made	made
knew	known

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

Sentences using the passive

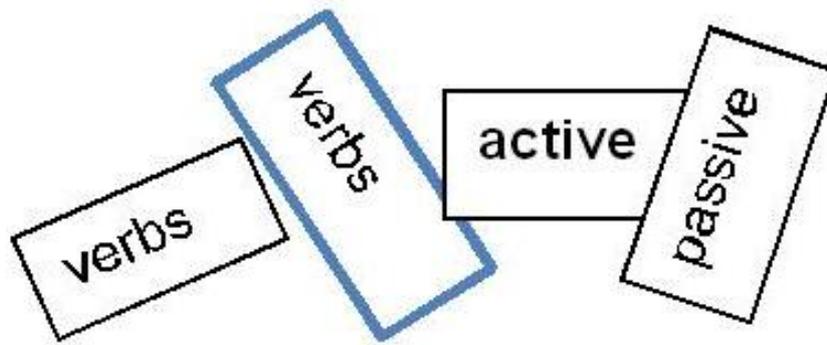
- The site was chosen because it was very fertile.
- The decision about the site has been made already.
- The site is not known by many people.
- The event will be run again this year.

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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