



WRITING CENTER QUICK REFERENCE PASSIVE VOICE

WHAT IS THE PASSIVE VOICE?

Voice refers to the form of the verb. The subject *acts* when you use the *active voice* verb form. When you use the *passive voice*, the person or thing performing the action becomes the object of the sentence. It does not act; it is *acted upon* by the verb. Look at the following:

- A. Patrick was introduced to Sandy by his friend Spongebob.
- B. Spongebob introduced his friend Patrick to Sandy.

In Example A (*passive*), the subject of the sentence (Patrick) does not do the action. Spongebob is the one who does the introducing, so he should be the subject, as he is in Example B (*active*).

Passive Construction	Who	had what done to it	by whom
Example A	Patrick	was introduced to Sandy	by Spongebob.
Active Construction	Who	did what	to whom
Example B	Spongebob	introduced Patrick	to Sandy.

WHY TO AVOID USING PASSIVE VOICE IN YOUR WRITING:

Passive voice saps the verb of its power and can make a sentence awkward and wordy. In all your writing you want to be clear and write with power.

SIGN OF PASSIVE VOICE:

Forms of *to be* (such as: *is, are, was, and were*) often indicate the passive voice.

- A. All of Mr. Krabs' food *was eaten* by Squidward.
- B. Squidward ate all of Mr. Krabs' food.

In sentence A, *was* signals the passive voice. The subject of the sentence is *food*, even though the actor is Squidward. In sentence A, the actor is passive and the food *gets eaten*;

it doesn't eat. In sentence B, the voice is active because the actor (Squidward) is the person who performs the action (*eats*). Note that as the sentence changes from passive to active, the stronger verb *ate* replaces the weak verb *was*, and the sentence becomes more direct and less wordy.

TO CORRECT THE PASSIVE VOICE:

Find the verb in the sentence so the actor completes the action:

Plankton's plans were foiled by several characters.

You can rewrite this as:

Several characters foiled Plankton's plans.

WHEN YOU NEED PASSIVE VOICE:

Sometimes you need to use passive voice. For example, if the recipient of the action is more important than the actor or if the actor is unknown, then use the passive voice:

The script of the first episode of Spongebob Squarepants was stolen from a Nickelodeon office yesterday.