

Active and Passive Voice

What is Voice in Grammar?

Voice in grammar is a study of the relationship of the verb with its subject and object.

- When the subject of a sentence performs the action, the sentence has an **active voice**.
- When the subject of the sentence merely receives the action, the sentence has a **passive voice**.

1. **Chandu** cut a tree.

The subject in this sentence is **Chandu** who performs the action of cutting a tree. Hence, the sentence is in the active voice.

2. **A tree** was cut by Chandu.

The subject in this sentence **tree** does not seem to perform the action. Instead, it seems to have received the action of 'being cut'. Hence, the sentence is in the passive voice.

Active Voice

The active voice is widely used in English and is preferred over the passive voice. It is direct and concise in nature and it makes the sentences sound assertive. In the active voice, the subject or doer is in focus and not the object.

The people selected the representative.
Helen sang a song.
Krishna took a bus to the station.

In the above sentences, the words **people**, **Helen** and **Krishna** are in the focus; the words **representative**, **song** and **bus** are in the background. Hence, the active voice is used.

Passive Voice

The passive voice has a tendency to render the sentences weak, unlike the active voice. Although it is generally considered undesirable in writing, there are instances where the passive voice is desired.

The representative was selected by the people.
A song was sung by Helen.
A bus was taken by Krishna to the station.

In the above cases, the words **representative**, **song** and **bus** are highlighted and the words **people**, **Helen** and **Krishna** are not given importance. Hence, the sentences are in the passive voice.

Transforming a Sentence from the Active to the Passive

While transforming a sentence into the passive voice, the easiest way is to interchange the position of the subject and the object.

	Subject	Verb	Object
Active Voice	The cat	chased	the rat
	Subject	Verb	Object
Passive Voice	The rat	is chased	by the cat.

Rules

- Historical instances sound better when expressed in the passive voice.
The kingdom was captured by the enemies.
The Declaration of Independence was signed on the 4th of July 1776.
- In the case of compound and complex sentences, all the clauses in the sentence should be in the same form.

Active voice	Passive voice
She drove the car home	and the garage door was opened by her. <i>Incorrect</i>

Active voice	Passive voice
She drove the car home	and opened the garage door. <i>Correct</i>

- When the doer of the action is important, use the active voice.
The Prime Minister spoke about the important issue.
Gretel wrote a letter.
- When the thing or person which gets affected by the action is important, use the passive voice.
The mangoes were picked from the orchard.
Michael was called by the boss.
- The passive voice is not possible when the verb used is intransitive.
Krishna runs fast.
Fast was ran by Krishna. *Incorrect*

Changes in Tense

Tense	Active Voice	Passive Voice
Simple present	The bees gather nectar.	Nectar is gathered by the bees.
Present continuous	Manish is writing a story.	A story is being written by Manish.
Present perfect	Reema has gifted Sheena.	Sheena has been gifted by Reema.
Present perfect continuous	Dad has been calling you.	-
Simple past	The monkeys stole food.	Food was stolen by the monkeys.
Past continuous	Geeta was cleaning the house.	The house was being cleaned by Geeta.
Past perfect	Chitra had finished the work.	The work had been finished by Chitra.
Past perfect continuous	Beena had been working.	-
Simple future	I will write a letter.	A letter will be written by me.
Future continuous	She will be grating cheese.	-
Future perfect	Dr Walsh will have discovered a cure.	A cure will have been discovered by Dr Walsh.
Future perfect continuous	Maria will have been cooking food.	-