

Active Voice & Passive Voice

We use **active voice** when the subject of the sentence (usually a noun or pronoun) performs the the action of the verb.

Active voice is helpful to use when writing most types of papers, like arguments, summaries, or creative pieces.

Example

<i>The chemist</i>	<i>conducted</i>	<i>experiments on phosphorous.</i>
(Subject doing the action)	(Active verb)	(Object receiving the action)

We use **passive voice** when the subject is receiving the action of the verb (the action *is being done to* the subject).

Passive voice is helpful to use in genres such as research papers or lab reports, where it's better to avoid the words "I" and "we." Passive voice emphasizes the object that receives the action, not the subject that performs the action. Therefore, **passive voice** is sometimes used when the subject performing the action is unknown or unimportant.

Example

<i>The experiment</i>	<i>was conducted</i>	<i>by the chemist.</i>
(Subject receiving the action)	(Passive verb)	(Phrase doing the actions)

Example

Passive voice without the person/thing doing the action

<i>The experiment</i>	<i>was conducted.</i>
(Subject receiving the action)	(Passive verb)

Which one is better?

That depends on the situation. You've probably learned that **academic papers** should avoid passive writing completely. Active voice makes your writing sound more direct, so you want your sentences to have more force when you're writing research papers that support an argumentative thesis statement.

But **scientific papers** usually require passive voice, because passive voice takes the agent (the person who did the experiment) out of the writing. Your lab report should focus less on you, the scientist, and more on presenting results and making it easy for readers to follow your process. That's how the scientific community tends to communicate its information.

Creative writing also uses passive voice. Sometimes an author may want to hide which character performed a certain action, or show that the character is distancing themselves from that action. The author may also decide that passive voice is better for the tone or mood of the story, or that passive sentence structure just sounds better in the rhythm of the story.