

What are Active and Passive Voice?

Active Voice:

In a sentence that uses active voice, the subject of the sentence is performing the action expressed by the verb.

Example: Donkeys like banjos.

In this sentence, *Donkeys*, the subject, is actively *liking* banjos.

Passive Voice:

In a sentence that uses passive voice, the subject receives the action expressed by the verb.

Example: Banjos are liked by donkeys.

In this sentence, the verb phrase *are liked* is acting upon the subject, *banjos*.

Active Voice	Passive Voice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am petting a cat.• Monkeys destroyed your room.• As Marco wrote in his article <i>Framing Photos</i>, "Yay photos" (29).• Only 30 people rode the rollercoaster before it burst into flames.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A cat is being pet by me.• Your room was destroyed.• In an article called <i>Framing Photos</i> written by Marco, it says "Yay photos" (29).• The rollercoaster was only ridden by 30 people before it burst into flames.

When do you use which voice?

Active voice is generally preferred over passive voice. Usually, appropriate times to use active voice in your writing include:

- Resumes
- Cover letters
- Promoting ideas
- Argumentative essays
- Persuasive writing

Active voice is better for these types of writing because you want your reader to believe what you are saying. You want your reader to think of you as an active writer that knows what you are talking about.

For example, if you were trying to convince someone that you should get a job, you shouldn't say:

“The files were placed correctly into a cabinet by me.”

Or

“Millions of children were helped thanks to me, and that is why the job should be given to me.”

You want to say:

“I have filed many times before.”

Or:

“I have helped millions of children and I am highly qualified for the job.”

It sounds more proactive and leaves your reader feeling like you've got things under control.

However, passive voice is not always wrong to use. Good times to use passive voice include:

- Scientific writing
- Creative writing
- To emphasize an object or verb over the subject
- To ignore or limit unnecessary information

Sometimes your reader doesn't need to know some information. In science writing, it is not necessary to connect yourself to what is happening. Your reader doesn't care that you were there while yeast was reacting to a chemical; they just want to know about the reaction.

When you want to emphasize an object or ignore certain information, passive voice can be used as well. If you want to tell your sister that you broke her guitar, but don't want her to know that it was you, you might say “Your guitar broke” instead of “I broke your guitar because I was trying to use it as a canoe paddle.” She doesn't need to know all of that information – that would just make her mad at you.