ENGLISH, LITERACY, AND COMMUNICATION

Active versus passive voice

Difficulty level: Advanced

English, Literacy, and Communication

This document was made by AI and there may be mistakes. If a question or answer looks wrong, use the Flag a mistake button to let Brett know so he can fix it.

Overview of the concept

This is how you choose what your reader notices first in a sentence. Active voice puts the person doing the action up front, which is what you want in a news report or a story. Passive voice puts what happened up front instead, which is what a lab report often needs when the result matters more than who did it.



Rule

Active versus passive voice: in the active voice, the doer of the action is the subject. In the passive voice, the receiver of the action is the subject, with was plus the past participle (the form of the verb that goes after was, like chased or eaten).

To change active to passive, make the receiver the subject, use was plus the past participle, and add by plus the doer. To change back, make the doer the subject.

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q Change to passive: The dog chased the cat.

SOLUTION

Find the receiver of the action: the cat. It becomes the new subject.

Use 'was' plus the past participle of 'chase': was chased. Add 'by the dog'.

So: The cat was chased by the dog.

EXAMPLE 2

Q Change to active: The cake was eaten by Sara.

SOLUTION

Find the doer: Sara. It becomes the new subject.

Put the verb in the active form: ate. The receiver becomes the object.

So: Sara ate the cake.

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

Practice questions

1 Change to passive: Tom kicked the ball.

- A The ball kicked Tom.
- B The ball was kicked by Tom.
- C Tom was kicked by the ball.
- D The ball is kicked by Tom.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

2 Change to active: The letter was written by Ana.

- A Ana wrote the letter.
- B Ana writes the letter.
- C The letter wrote Ana.
- D Ana was written by the letter.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

3 Change to passive: The cat is chasing the mouse.

A The mouse was chased by the cat.

B The mouse is being chased by the cat.

C The cat is being chased by the mouse.

D The mouse is chased by the cat.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

4 Change to active: The house is being built by the workers.

A The workers build the house.

B The house builds the workers.

C The workers are building the house.

D The workers are being built by the house.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

5 Change to passive: She paints the picture every day.

- A The picture is painted by her every day.
- B The picture was painted by her.
- C She is painted by the picture.
- D The picture paints her.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

6 Is this active or passive? The ball was thrown by Ben.

- A Active
- B Passive

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

7 Is this active or passive? Ben threw the ball.

- A Active
- B Passive

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

8 Change to passive: The gardener will plant the seeds.

- A The seeds will plant the gardener.
- B The gardener will be planted by the seeds.
- C The seeds are planted by the gardener.
- D The seeds will be planted by the gardener.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

9 Change to active: The song has been sung by the choir.

- A The choir sang the song.
- B The choir has sung the song.
- C The song has sung the choir.
- D The choir has been sung by the song.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

10 Change to passive: Someone has broken the vase.

- A The vase was broken.
- B Someone has been broken by the vase.
- C The vase has been broken.
- D The vase has broken someone.

Understand It with Pulse | Flag a mistake

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.

ANSWER KEY

1. The ball was kicked by Tom.

2. Ana wrote the letter.

3. The mouse is being chased by the cat.

4. The workers are building the house.

5. The picture is painted by her every day.

6. Passive

7. Active

8. The seeds will be planted by the gardener.

9. The choir has sung the song.

10. The vase has been broken.

© 2026 Brett Robbins. All Rights Reserved.