

Namaste English
Mastery Course on Active and Passive
By Santosh Sir

Active and Passive Voice

Day 2

Introduction to the course

- ❖ It's important that we have the knowledge of Active and Passive Voice along with the knowledge of tenses. So, this time we have brought a special course for you all.
- ❖ In this course you will get mastery on Voice.
- ❖ Your spoken part will improve.
- ❖ Your written part will be rhetoric, after you have attended all the sessions of this course.
- ❖

Active and Passive Voice

Active voice means that a sentence has a subject that acts upon its verb. **Passive voice** means that a subject is a recipient of a verb's action.



You may have learned that the passive voice is weak and incorrect, but it isn't that simple. When used correctly and in moderation, the passive voice is fine.

In English grammar, verbs have five properties: voice, mood, tense, person, and number; here, we are concerned with voice. The two grammatical voices are **active and passive**.

What's the difference between active and passive voice?

Active voice

When the subject of a sentence performs the verb's action, we say that the sentence is in the *active voice*. Sentences in the active voice have a strong, direct, and clear tone. Here are some short and straightforward examples of active voice.

Active voice examples

Monkeys adore bananas.

The cashier counted the money.

The dog chased the squirrel.

All three sentences have a basic active voice construction: subject, verb, and object. The subject *monkey* performs the action described by *adore*.

The subject *the cashier* performs the action described by *counted*. The

subject *the dog* performs the action described by *chased*. The subjects are

doing, doing, doing—they *take action* in their sentences. The active voice

reminds us of the popular Nike slogan, "Just Do It."



Passive voice

A sentence is in the passive voice, on the other hand, when the subject is acted on by the verb. The passive voice is always constructed with a conjugated form of *to be* plus the verb's past participle. Doing this usually generates a preposition as well. That sounds much more complicated than it is—passive voice is actually quite easy to detect. For these examples of passive voice, we will transform the three active sentences above to illustrate the difference.

Passive voice examples

Bananas are adored by monkeys.

The money was counted by the cashier.

The squirrel was chased by the dog.

Let's take a closer look at the first pair of sentences, "Monkeys adore bananas" and "Bananas are adored by monkeys." The active sentence consists of *monkeys* (subject) + *adore* (verb) + *bananas* (object). The passive sentence consists of *bananas* (object) + *are adored* (a form of *to be* plus the past participle *adored*) + *by* (preposition) + *monkeys* (subject). Making the sentence passive flipped the structure and necessitated the preposition *by*. In fact, all three of the transformed sentences above required the addition of *by*.

When to use active and passive voice

Using the active voice conveys a strong, clear tone and the passive voice is subtler and weaker. Here's some good advice: don't use the passive voice just because you think it sounds a bit fancier than the active voice.



That said, there are times the passive voice is useful and called for. Take “The squirrel was chased by the dog,” for example. That sentence construction would be helpful if the squirrel were the focus of your writing and not the dog.

A good rule of thumb is to try to put the majority of your sentences in the active voice, unless you truly can't write your sentence in any other way.

How to change a sentence in passive voice to active voice

Here is an example of a business communication that could be strengthened by abandoning the passive voice.

An error has occurred with your account, but every attempt was made to remedy it. That sentence is not incorrect, but it does sound a bit stiff and dishonest. It sounds less trustworthy than it could—almost evasive. Who wants to do business with a company that avoids taking full responsibility by slipping into formal passive voice territory? Face the responsibility head on instead. Own it.

We made an error with your account, but we have made every attempt to remedy it. To make that sentence active rather than passive, I identified the subject: *we*. It was “our company” that was responsible.

If there are any questions, I can be reached at the number below.

The structure of this sentence is weak because it doesn't identify the subjects in either clause. Let's unveil them. Who might have questions to ask? The person being addressed: *you*. Who will be doing the reaching (by calling the number below)? It is still the communication's recipient.

If you have any questions, call me at the number below.

Changing sentences in the simple present tense into passive

When the active verb is in the **simple present tense**, we make passive verb forms with **is/am/are + past participle form of the verb**. Note that the object of the active verb becomes the subject of the passive verb. The subject of the active verb becomes the object of the passive verb. However, in most cases, the object is not mentioned in the passive voice.

Read the following sentences.

She writes a story. (Active) (Subject – she; verb – writes; object – a story)

We have already learned that the object of the active verb becomes the subject of the passive verb. Therefore when we change the above sentence into the passive, 'a story' becomes the subject.

- A story **is written** by her.
- She adores kids. (Active) (Subject – she; verb – adores; object – kids)
- Kids **are adored** by her. (Passive)

Exercise

Change the following sentences in the active voice into the passive voice.

1. He helps us.
2. Doctors treat patients.
3. Teachers teach students.
4. Parents bring up children.
5. We love our country.
6. Masons build houses.
7. Carpenters make furniture.
8. Mechanics repair cars.



Answers

1. We are helped by him.
2. Patients are treated by doctors.
3. Students are taught by teachers.
4. Children are brought up by parents.
5. Our country is loved by us.
6. Houses are built by masons.
7. Furniture is made by carpenters.
8. Cars are repaired by mechanics.

About the Instructor

Santosh Sen (B.Ed. in English, University of Delhi)

Santosh Sir has wide teaching experience of more than 5 years in English Language and Literature. He is an ex-faculty of Exam Mitra Institute, Delhi. Students have known him as a teacher who makes English Learning easy by his short methods and tricks.

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