

## VERBS: ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

PS-23

Verbs are in active voice when their subjects perform the action and in passive voice when their subjects receive the action.

### Conditions to Create the Passive Voice

The following conditions create the passive voice.

1. The **action of the verb** is received by the subject.
2. The verb is made up of a form of the verb **to be**: be, being, been, is, are, was, were.
3. The **past participle** form of the verb is used.
4. Frequently, a **prepositional phrase** beginning with the word "by" is used after the verb.

**EXAMPLE:** The <sup>1</sup> ball <sup>2</sup> was <sup>3</sup> thrown <sup>4</sup> by John.

In the example, the numbered items illustrate the conditions that create the passive voice.

1. The ball is receiving the action of being thrown.
2. "Was" is a form of the verb "to be."
3. "Thrown" is the past participial tense of throw.
4. The sentence contains the prepositional phrase, "by John."

### To change the passive to the active voice:

1. **Provide a subject.** A direct object can be used as a subject. If the sentence uses the "by" prepositional phrase, the subject may be in the prepositional phrase. If no subject is specified, a subject may be provided that would logically perform the stated action.
2. **Change the past participle tense of the verb to the past tense.**

**EXERCISE 1:** The four conditions of passive voice listed at the top of this page are written in passive voice. Rewrite the four conditions by changing the passive voice to the active voice.

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**EXERCISE 2:** Rewrite the following sentences by changing the passive voice to active voice. Remember that you might have to supply a subject. Although your answers might vary from those listed at the end of the packet, your sentence should contain a subject that is doing the action of the verb.

1. The Director of Technology was asked to present the quality award to the staff of the Production Department.
2. Snow had been forecast to begin around noon; however, sand was spread on the roads by the snow trucks beginning at dawn.
3. For a cleaner environment, it is recommended that all plastic bottles be recycled.
4. The carpet was to be replaced by the landlord, but it was cleaned instead.
5. An intranet network has been implemented in most large corporations for internal communications.

**EXERCISE 3:** Rewrite the following sentences by changing the active voice to passive voice.

1. The accountant slammed the folder on the table and angrily confronted his client.
2. Entrepreneurs make money from the ideas of inventors.
3. Television should not portray scenes of brutal killings.
4. My grandfather built hand-made rocking chairs.
5. Alexander the Great founded nineteen cities named Alexandria.

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### **SHIFTS IN VOICE**

**A shift in voice means that the subject of the sentence performs the action (active voice) in one part of the sentence, but receives the action (passive voice) in another part of the sentence.** Frequently a sentence containing a shift in voice is confusing. Additionally, the sentence "sounds funny," while appearing to be grammatically correct. **If you think a sentence does not sound right, but cannot find an error, check for voice shift.**

**VOICE SHIFT:** When students study their homework assignments, good grades are made on tests.

"When students study their homework assignments" is in active voice.

". . .good grades can be made on tests" is in passive voice.

**ACTIVE VOICE:** When students study their homework assignments, they make good grades on tests.

**EXERCISE 4:** Rewrite the following sentences in active voice to eliminate the voice shifts. Then, rewrite them in passive voice to observe the change in tone.

1. At the dinner party they were entertained by a comedian and ate a gourmet meal.
2. The ancient Egyptians created the tradition of wearing a ring on the bride's fourth finger and makeup was worn.
3. Every accountant learns that "net worth = assets - liabilities," but the formula has been lived by the new business owner.
4. The employees were terminated by the company, and profitability improved.
5. Susan submitted her application, interviewed for the position, and was employed by the advertising agency.

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### **ANSWERS TO PRACTICE EXERCISES**

#### **Exercise 1:**

1. The subject receives the action of the verb.
2. A form of the verb "to be" makes up the verb.
3. The sentence uses the past participle form of the verb. (Note that you had to supply a subject.)
4. The sentence contains a prepositional phrase that begins with the word "by."

#### **Exercise 2: Active Voice**

1. The Production Manager asked the Director of Technology to present the quality award to the Production Department staff. (You may have supplied a different subject.)
2. Even though the weather bureau predicted that the snow would begin around noon, the snow trucks began spreading sand on the roads at dawn. (Subject supplied and however changed to even though.)
3. For a cleaner environment, the Solid Waste Department recommends that all plastic bottles be recycled.
4. The landlord cleaned the carpet, although he was supposed to replace it.
5. Most large corporations have implemented an intranet network to internal communications.

#### **Exercise 3: Passive Voice**

1. The client was confronted by the accountant who angrily slammed the folder on the table.
2. Money can be made by entrepreneurs who use the ideas of inventors.
3. Brutal killings should not be portrayed on television.
4. Hand-made rocking chairs were built by my grandfather.
5. Nineteen cities named Alexandria were founded by Alexander the Great.

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### **Exercise 4: Correcting Voice Shift (A=Active; P=Passive)**

1. A=At the dinner party a comedian entertained them, and they ate a gourmet meal.  
P=At the dinner party they were entertained by a comedian and served a gourmet meal.
2. A=The ancient Egyptians created the tradition of wearing makeup and a ring on the bride's fourth finger.  
P=The tradition of wearing makeup and a ring on the bride's fourth finger was created by the Egyptians.
3. A=Every accountant learns that "net worth = assets - liabilities," but the new business owner lives the formula.  
P=Every accountant has been taught that "net worth = assets - liabilities," but the formula has been lived by the new business owner.
4. A=The company terminated the employees and profitability improved.  
P=The employees were terminated by the company, and profitability was improved.
5. A=Susan submitted her application, interviewed for the position, and the advertising agency employed her.  
P=Susan's application was submitted, she was interviewed for the position, and was employed by the advertising agency.