APA STYLE

7th Edition

# Let's Get Active: Active Voice Writing Guide

Use this guide to understand what voice is and how it is used in APA Style. Then practice rewriting sentences from the passive voice to the active voice to help make your writing more clear and concise.

## What Is Voice?

In general, *voice* is the tone or attitude conveyed by the writer in a piece of prose. Grammatically, *voice* describes the relationship between a verb and the subject and object associated with it.

## What Is Active Voice?

In *active voice*, the subject performs the action expressed by the verb. Therefore, the subject of a sentence is followed by the verb and then the object of the verb.

- Example: The teacher gave scratch paper to the students before they took their test.

## What Is Passive Voice?

In *passive voice*, the verb expresses the action of the subject. Therefore, the object of the verb is followed by the verb (usually a form of "to be" + past participle + the word "by") and then the subject.

- Example: The scratch paper was given to the students by their teacher before they took their test.

## Are Active Voice and Passive Voice Allowed in APA Style?

You can use both the active and the passive voice in your APA Style papers. However, it is common for writers to overuse the passive voice, which can hinder your ability to effectively communicate with your readers and cause unnecessary confusion.

If the subject "teacher" is omitted from the sentence "The scratch paper was given to the students by the teacher before they took their test," then who gave the scratch paper to the students?

## When to Use Active Voice

To create direct, clear, and concise sentences, especially when you are writing about the actions of people, use the active voice.

- Example: Health department officials reported data on the spread of the COVID-19 Pirola variant.

## When to Use Passive Voice

When it is more important to focus on the recipient of an action and not on who performed the action, such as when describing an experimental setup, use the passive voice.

- Example: The soil quality experiment was conducted in three stages—each stage judging the improvement of the soil when infused with a substantial number of unknown organic ingredients.

# Active Voice Activity

Directions: The following sentences are written in passive voice. Rewrite each sentence in active voice in the space provided.

1. The toy was assembled by Julian and Oliver.

2. The soccer ball was kicked by Kia after her teammate rolled it to her.

3. Four specialty cakes were made by Mr. Mars, the baker, for his favorite customers.

4. A bedtime story was read to the grandchildren by their grandfather.

5. There was a great concert held downtown last night by the musical duo Silk Sonic.

6. The car was driven to the grocery store by my mom.

7. A sociological experiment was conducted by scientists to test their theory.

8. The seventh edition style manuals were created by the American Psychological Association (APA).

9. Five community leaders were chosen by the town council to head the environmental committee.

10. Going to the beach every summer was really enjoyed by the Miller family.

## Answers

1. Julian and Oliver assembled the toy.
2. Kia kicked the soccer ball after her teammate rolled it to her.
3. Mr. Mars, the baker, made four specialty cakes for his favorite customers.
4. The grandfather read a bedtime story to his grandchildren.
5. Last night, the musical duo Silk Sonic held a great concert downtown.
6. My mom drove the car to the grocery store.
7. Scientists conducted a sociological experiment to test their theory.
8. The American Psychological Association (APA) created the seventh edition style manuals.
9. The town council chose five community leaders to head the environmental committee.
10. The Miller family really enjoyed going to the beach every summer.

## Extra Help

The next time you write a draft, double-check your sentences. Ask yourself, is it more important to highlight those performing the actions (i.e., active voice), or is it more important to highlight those receiving the actions (i.e., passive voice)? Then edit your work accordingly.

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More information on APA Style can be found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.) and the *Concise Guide to APA Style* (7th ed.).

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