



Avoiding Passive Voice



Defining *Voice*

- ▶ In grammar, voice denotes the relationship of the subject to the verb of the sentence.
- ▶ In active voice, the subject is active. It performs the action of the verb.

Jesus healed the leper.

- ▶ Only action verbs have voice.



- ▶ In passive voice, the subject is passive in relation to the verb. The subject is acted upon.
- ▶ Passive voice verbs consist of the use of a being verb along with the past participle of an action verb.

The leper was touched by Jesus.

In the preceding sentence the leper is passive in relation to the verb. Also, note the *being* verb *was* is used with the *-ed* verb.

- ▶ In many sentences in the passive voice, the noun that actually performs the action is the object of a preposition following the verb:

Seven personal fouls were called by one referee against the Saints.

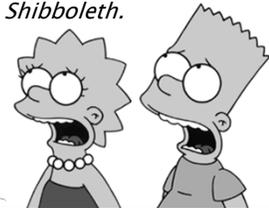
Correct: One referee called seven personal fouls against the Saints.



- ▶ Other passive voice sentences, however, do not identify who is doing the action.

Incorrect: Thirty thousand Gibeonites were killed after they could not pronounce the word *Shibboleth*.

Corrected: Jephthah's troops killed thirty-thousand Gibeonites after they could not pronounce the word *Shibboleth*.



- ▶ Advantages of the active voice:
 - More concise
 - More specific
 - More energetic/forceful
- ▶ Uses of the passive voice
 - When the actual subject is unknown
 - When the writer wants to *emphasize the recipient of the action rather than the doer of the action.*



- ▶ Remember, writing a sentence in the passive voice is not a grammatical mistake. It is a matter of style, and professors prefer that students write in the active voice whenever possible.



The Write Stuff

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