

EXERCISE SHEET: ACTIVE VS PASSIVE VOICE

Active voice occurs when a **clear subject** performs a **clear action**.

Passive voice occurs when one uses a “to-be” verb (*am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been*) with a past tense verb. Sentences with “to-be” verbs are passive because they describe an object rather than show action.

Sentences that have personal pronouns or abstract concepts as their subjects sometimes only make sense in passive voice.

CHANGING PASSIVE VOICE TO ACTIVE VOICE

1. **Find the action** – First, if there is a verb connected to the “to-be” verb of the sentence, then it may be the main action. If the only verb in the sentence is a “to-be” verb, then it must be replaced with an action.
2. **Determine the “doer” of the action**– Next, find the “doer,” or subject, of the action. This “doer” may be in the sentence or a previous sentence.
3. **Rearrange the sentence** – Finally, rearrange the sentence so that the new subject and its following action are at the beginning of the sentence.
4. **Polish the sentence** – Check your sentence to make sure that it flows well. If part of the sentence sounds awkward, consider changing your wording.

EXAMPLES

1. The paper was written by Colin. (*Passive Voice*)
 - **Find the action:** The paper was **written** by Colin.
 - **Determine the “doer”:** The paper was **written** by **Colin**.
 - **Rearrange the sentence:** **Colin wrote** the paper. (*Active Voice*)
2. There was a vast wealth of knowledge in the book that Becky read.
 - **Find the action:** There was a vast wealth of knowledge in the book that Becky **read**.
 - **Determine the “doer”:** There was a vast wealth of knowledge in the book that **Becky read**.
 - **Rearrange the sentence:** **Becky read** a vast wealth of knowledge in the book. (*Active Voice*)
 - **Polish the sentence:** **Becky discovered** a vast wealth of knowledge in **her** book. (*Active Voice*)

See the next page for exercises

EXERCISES

Determine if these sentences are in the active or passive voice. If a sentence is in the active voice, identify its subject and verb. If a sentence is in the passive voice, rewrite it so that it is in the active voice. (If a passive sentence has no “doer,” make one up!)

1. The coffee was still boiling after it was served.
2. The students worked on their papers all night.
3. The wind was making the tree sway.
4. Kana has been holding her hand up to answer the question.
5. The three dogs were being walked.
6. The earth continually spins on its axis.
7. The students were released from class.
8. Nathaniel gave his speech flawlessly.
9. Without interruption, the scarf was knit by Margot.
10. We were driven to the beach by Caleb in his minivan.
11. The class was taught by Heather in the evenings.
12. Café Moka closed early, so Danielle brewed her own pot of coffee.
13. The professor and her aid passed out the exam, and it was taken by the students.
14. Griff explained the importance of proofreading one’s sentences.
15. The exercise sheet was finished by you!

EXERCISES: ANSWERS

1. The coffee was still boiling after it was served.
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** The coffee still boiled after Angela served it.
2. The students worked on their papers all night.
Answer: Active voice. **Subject:** the students. **Verb:** worked.
3. The wind was making the tree sway.
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** The wind made the tree sway.
4. Kana has been holding her hand up to answer the question.
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** Kana held her hand up to answer the question.
5. The three dogs were being walked.
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** Joe walked his three dogs.
6. The earth continually spins on its axis.
Answer: Active voice. **Subject:** the earth. **Verb:** spins.
7. The students were released from class.
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** The teacher released the students from class.
8. Nathaniel gave his speech flawlessly.
Answer: Active voice. **Subject:** Nathaniel. **Verb:** gave.
9. Without interruption, the scarf was knit by Margot.
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** Without interruption, Margot knit the scarf.
10. We were driven to the beach by Caleb in his minivan.
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** Caleb drove us to the beach in his minivan.
11. The class was taught by Heather in the evenings.
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** Heather taught the class in the evenings.
12. Café Moka closed early, so Danielle brewed her own pot of coffee.
Answer: Active voice. **Subjects:** Café Moka, Danielle. **Verbs:** closed, brewed.
13. The professor and her aid passed out the exam, and it was taken by the students.
Answer: Active voice, Passive voice. **Subjects:** the professor and her aid. **Verb:** passed.
Revision: The professor and her aid passed out the exam, and the students took it.
14. Griff explained the importance of proofreading one's sentences.
Answer: Active voice. **Subject:** Griff. **Verb:** explained.
15. The exercise sheet was finished by you!
Answer: Passive voice. **Revision:** You finished the exercise sheet!