Passive vs Active Voice

Which One Do I Use?

**Active voice** clearly identifies which person or thing (the *actor*) is doing the action (*verb*) by placing it *before* the verb. Active voice encourages clarity and specificity.

**Passive voice** de-emphasizes the *actor* by placing it after the *verb* or removing it entirely.

### Active Voice

The *actor* (doing the action) appears before the *verb* (action). Emphasis remains on the actor doing the action.

**Example:**

*The client displays* maladaptive behavior.

### Passive Voice

The *actor* (doing the action) appears late in the sentence – if at all – after the *verb* (action). This format *de-emphasizes* or *hides* the role of the subject.

**Example:**

*Maladaptive behavior is displayed by the client.*

In both sentences, the *client* is *displaying*; however, the order is reversed!

**Recognizing and Replacing Passive Voice**

Look for the word “by” and forms of the verb “to be” to help you locate passive voice.

The sentence *may* be using passive voice if...

**...the actor appears after the word “by”**

Examples:

- The guest *was introduced* by the student.
- The problem *was discovered* by the council.

**...the verb includes a form of “to be” (is, are, was, were, will be).**

Examples:

- CBT *was recommended* by the therapist.
- Many children *are affected* by homelessness.

**Now what?**

- Simply put, switch the order of words and put the *actor* before the *verb*.
- Sometimes, the actor will be missing from the sentence and you will need to ask yourself who or what is doing the action? That’s your actor!

**Passive voice:** *Previous interventions were rejected by the family.*

1. Locate the verb - remember to look for forms of “be” - *were rejected*.
2. Locate the actor – look for “by” – *by the family*.
3. Switch the order! Actor first, then verb, then the rest of the sentence.

**Active Voice:** *The family rejected previous interventions.*
Passive vs Active Voice

Now You Try!

Change each of the passive voice sentences below to active voice. If you cannot find the actor in a sentence, make up an actor that makes sense in context.

1. New insights are provided about the expanded definition of homelessness and household stability.
   - New insights are provided about the expanded definition of homelessness and household stability. The actor is the person who provided the insights.

2. Our greatest success is when homeless youth are moved out of temporary housing and into a permanent placement.
   - Our greatest success is when homeless youth are moved out of temporary housing and into a permanent placement. The actor could be the social workers or the organization responsible for providing temporary housing.

3. The chronically homeless are frequently viewed as unemployable by government agencies.
   - The chronically homeless are frequently viewed as unemployable by government agencies. The actor is the government agencies.

4. Homeless youth are often referred to as “unaccompanied youth.”
   - Homeless youth are often referred to as “unaccompanied youth.” The actor could be the person or organization responsible for referring to them.

5. It is believed that between 20% and 40% of homeless youth are LGBT.
   - It is believed that between 20% and 40% of homeless youth are LGBT. The actor is believed by various sources.

6. The 1990s were characterized by socioeconomic changes that contributed to an increase in homeless youth.
   - The 1990s were characterized by socioeconomic changes that contributed to an increase in homeless youth. The actor could be the socioeconomic changes.

7. While accurate numbers are difficult to find, it is estimated that between 6% and 22% of homeless girls are pregnant.
   - While accurate numbers are difficult to find, it is estimated that between 6% and 22% of homeless girls are pregnant. The actor could be the estimate.

8. Aging out of programs is often cited as a major reason for homelessness by former foster youth.
   - Aging out of programs is often cited as a major reason for homelessness by former foster youth. The actor could be the former foster youth.

9. Homeless children who attend school are more likely to be bullied by their peers.
   - Homeless children who attend school are more likely to be bullied by their peers. The actor could be the homeless children.

10. Most low-income housing is designated for families and unavailable to homeless youth.
    - Most low-income housing is designated for families and unavailable to homeless youth. The actor could be the housing authorities.

Passive Voice vs Active Voice Quick Guide

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