

Faculty of Exact Sciences

English Lessons

Active and Passive Voice

A Comprehensive Guide with Examples and
Activities

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Introduction

What is Voice?

In English grammar, **Voice** refers to the relationship between the **subject** and the **verb** in a sentence. It indicates whether the subject *performs* the action or *receives* the action.

There are two voices in English:

- ✓ **Active Voice** — The subject performs the action
- ✓ **Passive Voice** — The subject receives the action

1 Active Voice

Definition

The **Active Voice** is used when the **subject** of the sentence is the **doer** of the action. The sentence follows the pattern:

Subject + Verb + Object

Examples of Active Voice

1. The student **wrote** the essay.
 - Subject (doer): The student
 - Verb: wrote
 - Object (receiver): the essay
2. Dr. Smith **discovered** the new element.
 - Subject: Dr. Smith
 - Verb: discovered
 - Object: the new element
3. The chemist **heated** the solution.
 - Subject: The chemist
 - Verb: heated
 - Object: the solution

When to Use Active Voice

- To emphasize the **doer** of the action
- In everyday communication and general writing
- When clarity and directness are important
- In scientific **Methods** sections when describing what **you** did

2 Passive Voice

Definition

The **Passive Voice** is used when the **subject** of the sentence is the **receiver** of the action. The sentence follows the pattern:

Subject + to be + Past Participle + (by + Agent)

Transforming Active to Passive

Active Voice	→	Passive Voice
The student wrote the essay.	→	The essay was written (by the student).
Dr. Smith discovered the element.	→	The element was discovered (by Dr. Smith).
The chemist heated the solution.	→	The solution was heated (by the chemist).

Passive Voice Formation — All Tenses

Tense	Active	Passive
Simple Present	He writes	It is written
Present Continuous	He is writing	It is being written
Simple Past	He wrote	It was written
Past Continuous	He was writing	It was being written
Present Perfect	He has written	It has been written
Past Perfect	He had written	It had been written
Simple Future	He will write	It will be written
Future Perfect	He will have written	It will have been written
Modals	He can write	It can be written

3 When to Use Passive Voice

Important — Scientific Writing

In **scientific writing**, the Passive Voice is commonly used in the **Methods** section to emphasize the **process** rather than the researcher.

Scientific Examples

1. **Active:** *We heated the solution to 100°C.*
2. **Passive:** *The solution **was heated** to 100°C.*
3. **Active:** *The researchers measured the conductivity.*
4. **Passive:** *The conductivity **was measured**.*
5. **Active:** *They synthesized the compound using sol-gel method.*
6. **Passive:** *The compound **was synthesized** using sol-gel method.*

When to Use Passive Voice

- When the **doer** is unknown or unimportant
- When the **action** or **result** is more important than the doer
- In scientific **Methods** sections
- To create an objective, impersonal tone
- When the doer is obvious from context

4 Activities and Exercises

Activity 1: Identify the Voice

Identify whether each sentence is in the **Active** or **Passive** voice.

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. The experiment was conducted at room temperature. | Passive |
| 2. The scientist analyzed the data carefully. | Active |
| 3. The samples were collected from three locations. | Passive |
| 4. She will present the results tomorrow. | Active |
| 5. The theory has been challenged by recent findings. | Passive |
| 6. They are investigating the new phenomenon. | Active |

Activity 2: Transform Active to Passive

Rewrite the following sentences in the **passive voice**.

- The researcher **measured** the temperature.
→ The temperature **was measured** (by the researcher).
- The team **has discovered** a new compound.
→ A new compound **has been discovered** (by the team).
- We **will analyze** the results next week.
→ The results **will be analyzed** next week.
- The assistant **was preparing** the samples.
→ The samples **were being prepared** (by the assistant).
- Someone **stole** my notebook.
→ My notebook **was stolen**.

Activity 3: Transform Passive to Active

Rewrite the following sentences in the **active voice**.

1. The solution **was heated** to boiling point.
→ The chemist **heated** the solution to boiling point.
2. The data **have been analyzed** statistically.
→ The researchers **have analyzed** the data statistically.
3. A new method **will be developed**.
→ They **will develop** a new method.
4. The crystals **were examined** under microscope.
→ The scientist **examined** the crystals under microscope.

Activity 4: Scientific Writing Practice

Complete the following methods section using the **passive voice**.

1. The samples _____ (prepare) by grinding in an agate mortar.
→ The samples **were prepared** by grinding in an agate mortar.
2. The mixture _____ (heat) at 800°C for 24 hours.
→ The mixture **was heated** at 800°C for 24 hours.
3. The resulting powder _____ (characterize) by X-ray diffraction.
→ The resulting powder **was characterized** by X-ray diffraction.
4. Electrical conductivity _____ (measure) using the four-point probe method.
→ Electrical conductivity **was measured** using the four-point probe method.

5 Common Mistakes

Mistakes to Avoid

✗ Wrong auxiliary verb:

*The experiment ~~is conducted~~ yesterday. → The experiment **was conducted** yesterday.*

✗ Forgetting past participle:

*The solution ~~was heat~~. → The solution **was heated**.*

✗ Using passive when active is clearer:

*It ~~was decided~~ by the committee that... → The committee **decided** that...*

✗ Double subject in passive:

*~~The solution it was heated~~. → The solution **was heated**.*

Summary: Active vs. Passive

Feature	Active Voice	Passive Voice
Focus	The doer	The action/result
Structure	S + V + O	S + to be + PP + (by agent)
Scientific use	Introduction, Conclusion	Methods section
Clarity	Direct, clear	More formal, objective
Example	We measured X.	X was measured.

6 Final Challenge

Complete the Paragraph

Read the following paragraph. Rewrite it entirely in the **passive voice** (where appropriate for scientific style).

Original (Active):

We synthesized the nanoparticles using a hydrothermal method. First, we dissolved 2g of titanium dioxide in 50ml of distilled water. Then we stirred the solution for 30 minutes. We transferred the mixture to an autoclave and heated it at 200°C for 12 hours. Finally, we washed the product with ethanol and dried it overnight.

Rewrite in Passive:

The nanoparticles _____ (synthesize) using a hydrothermal method. First, 2g of titanium dioxide _____ (dissolve) in 50ml of distilled water. Then the solution _____ (stir) for 30 minutes. The mixture _____ (transfer) to an autoclave and _____ (heat) at 200°C for 12 hours. Finally, the product _____ (wash) with ethanol and _____ (dry) overnight.

Answers: were synthesized, was dissolved, was stirred, was transferred, heated, was washed, dried

Remember

Active = Who did it?

Passive = What happened?

End of Lesson

Practice makes perfect!

Dr. OUAAR Fatima — 2025/2026