

INSTRUCTOR: "Active Voice Versus Passive Voice." We know that something active moves around and does things, whereas something passive generally does not move or do things.

In grammar, we say that a sentence is active, or in the active voice, when the subject is doing the action. The dog licked the cat. In this sentence, dog is the subject, and the sentence tells us what action the dog performed. He licked the cat. So this sentence is active.

A sentence is in the passive voice when the action is done to the subject. For this reason, in a passive voice sentence, the word by often appears after the verb. The cat was licked by the dog. In this sentence, cat is the subject. But the cat isn't performing the action, the dog is. Therefore, we say that the sentence is in the passive voice.

In general, the active voice is preferable to the passive because it is livelier and more concise. The car is being washed by Audrey. To test whether this is active or passive, ask yourself, is the subject doing the action or having something done to it?

In this case, the car is the subject, but it is not performing an action. The car is receiving the action-- the washing-- which is being performed by Audrey. Therefore, the construction is passive. Note that in this sentence, the word by is also a clue that it's passive.

To make this sentence active, put Audrey into the subject position. Audrey is washing the car. Now the subject-- Audrey-- is doing the action.

Some passive sentences don't mention an actor at all, so the reader doesn't know who is doing the action. The car is being washed. In this passive sentence, we know that the subject-- car-- is receiving the action, but we don't know who is washing the car.

To make this sentence active, add a subject that is performing the action. Audrey is washing the car. Now the subject-- Audrey-- is doing the action.

Remember, using the active rather than the passive voice will make your writing livelier and more concise.