

How to Fix Passive Voice

Voice provides your writing with distinctiveness and a sense of flavor, which may--or may not--give your audience a desire to continue reading your work. For example, active voice gives your writing authority and a closer connection to your audience, because you're talking directly to them. Passive voice also allows you to talk to your audience, but in a bland, indirect way without conviction. Therefore, for stronger, more authoritative voice in your writing, you must know how to fix passive voice.

Know the difference between passive and active voice

- Passive voice transpires when you place the object where the subject of the sentence usually goes. For example, a passive sentence includes "The cookies were stolen by Mark." In other words, the object "cookies" placed before "Mark" slows action down.
- Active voice occurs when you place the subject in the proper place. The sentence "Mark stole the cookies" places the subject in the correct place and shows action.

Look for passive words in a sentence.

Read the sentence to find what's happening

An active sentence describes the action.

- Answer the question, "does the sentence place the action at the beginning of the sentence?"
- Study the sentence for extra words or phrases. Typically, a passive sentence includes useless words or phrases that end with "by." A passive sentence with the word "by" often places important information at the end of a sentence. For example, "the character of Ricky was played by the actor named Mike" shows the important information-the actor's name-at the end.

Eliminate words that slow down action

- Passive voice includes the words "to be" or those in any form in sentences. For example, "Debbie will be due in September." or "The telephone company will be arriving at 2:30 p.m."
- Also, notice any words that slow the action of your sentence. Words such as am, was, were, is, are, will have been, being, had been and have been are forms of "to be".

Rephrase the passive sentence

- Eliminate passive words from your sentence.

Take the remaining words and rephrase them into an active sentence

In the example sentence, "Debbie will be due in September," you can eliminate the entire phrase "will be due in" and replace it with "gives birth in." Thus, the sentence becomes "Debbie gives birth in September."

Reread the corrected passive sentence

- Read the new sentence making sure it denotes action.

Warnings

- Don't rely on grammar checkers included in software such as Microsoft Word. Grammar checkers won't check for, or correct, passive voice.
- Watch out when revising a passive sentence. Passive voice often denotes past present language. Therefore, not all sentences that include the words "have" or "has" are passive. Sometimes the words describe an action such as "Mike has 10 minutes to arrive."

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