Active and Passive Voices

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Understand the difference between active and passive voices.
• Identify active and passive voices in sentences.
• Use active and passive voices in sentences.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Active and Passive Voices (BLM 6)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and the practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.

1. Focus

Explain Active and Passive Voices

Say: Sentences can either be active or passive. In sentences that use an active voice, the doer of the action is the subject, and the receiver of the action is the object. Listen to this sentence: “The boy sharpens the pencil.” The word boy is the subject and performs the action, sharpens. So sharpens is an active verb. Now I’ll express the same thought in a passive voice: “The pencil is sharpened by the boy.” Now pencil is the subject. The pencil is the receiver of the action. The phrase is sharpened is passive. Notice how the passive verb is made up of a form of to be plus the past tense form of the main verb. Using a passive sentence changes the emphasis. The emphasis in the active sentence is on the boy. But in the passive sentence, the emphasis is on the pencil. Good writing uses mostly active verbs and sentences. Active verbs and sentences are clearer and more direct. But there are times when it is appropriate to use passive sentences, for example, when you want to focus on the receiver of the action in the sentence, or when the person performing the action is unknown.

Model Using Active and Passive Voices

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources, and read it aloud to students.

Active Voice

Eva made mistakes on the test.

Passive Voice

Mistakes on the test were made by Eva.

Modeling Text

After active voice. Say: These two sentences say the same thing, but the active sentence is easier to understand. It tells me who did what, in that order. Eva, the subject of the sentence, made mistakes. The verb made is the simple past tense. It’s an active verb.

After passive voice. Say: The passive sentence is a little confusing. It takes me longer to sort out who did what. The verb phrase were made is passive. It consists of the plural past tense of be plus the past tense form of make. I should use the version of the sentence with the active verb.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Active and Passive Voices

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Ask student pairs to identify the sentences that use active voice and those that use passive voice. (Students do not need to copy the sentences.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Text</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Two books were taken from the library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Micah cleaned all the windows on the front of the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The huge oak tree was cut down by the lumberjack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The answers to the homework are erased by Beth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Practice Sentences

Invite pairs to share their results. Discuss their responses. Ask the following questions:
- Is the verb in the sentence active or passive?
- How could you tell?
- Who or what is the receiver of the action in the sentence? Who or what is the doer, if any?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that active sentences emphasize the doer of the action in a sentence, while passive sentences emphasize the receiver of the action. Passive verbs are sometimes called for, especially when the doer of the action in a sentence is unimportant or unknown. When you write a sentence in the passive voice, think carefully about whether it is the best way to express your meaning. Using mostly active voices will help make your informational text be clear and easy to understand.

If you would like to give students additional practice with active and passive voices, have them complete BLM 6.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud examples of active and passive sentences from their reports.