Active and Passive Voices

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 cat chases the mouse.” The word *cat* is the subject and performs the action, *chases*. So *chases* is an active verb. Now I’ll use a sentence with a passive voice to say the same thing: “The mouse is chased by the cat.” Now *mouse* is the subject. The mouse is the receiver of the action. The phrase *is chased* 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 cat. But in the passive sentence, the emphasis is on the mouse. Active sentences are often clearer and easier for the reader to understand. We should mostly use active sentences. But you can use passive sentences when the receiver of the action is more important than the doer or the doer 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.

**Passive Voice**

When a part of the brain that controls a certain activity is **damaged**, sometimes another part of the brain takes over that role.

**Active Voice**

Through rigorous practice, he **trained** another part of his brain to become its speech center.

After passive voice. **Say:** The subject in the dependent clause of the first sentence is **a part of the brain**. I can tell that the verb that goes with this subject, **is damaged**, is passive because it is made up of a form of *to be* plus the past tense form of the main verb. The subject of this sentence is the receiver of the action. **The part of the brain** receives the damage. This use of the passive is okay because the writer wants to talk about the part of the brain, not what caused the damage.

After active voice. **Say:** The second sentence is active. **The doer, he, is the subject of the sentence. The verb trained is a past tense verb. This sentence tells me who did what, in that order: He trained his brain.**
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Active and Passive Voices

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

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

1. Marge helped others throughout her life.
2. Many jobs are done by the brain.
3. Your brain is protected by the skull and a layer of fluid.
4. These fats keep your neuron connections healthy.

Practice Text

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 doer of the action in the sentence? Who or what is the receiver?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that active sentences emphasize the doer of the action in a sentence. Passive sentences emphasize the receiver of the action. You can use the passive voice in your writing, but don’t overuse it. Use it when the doer of the action is unimportant or unknown. Writing mostly active sentences will help make your informational text clear and easy to understand.

If you would like to give students additional practice with active and passive voices, have them complete BLM 8.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud their answers and sentences from BLM 8. Use students’ answers to provide corrective feedback. Ask students to share what they learned about active and passive voices.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Beginning ELs will need support in identifying the subject, verb, and object in sentences before they can understand active and passive voices. Provide examples of simple sentences and act them out to show who does what to whom. Say: I give Amy a book. Dramatize the action. Write the sentence on chart paper, and label the subject, verb, and object. Repeat with other sentences.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers to complete the practice activity. Make sure that students understand the meaning of the sentences before they begin the activity.