The Passive Voice

Student Name:

Instructor:

Date:

Course

# About This DLA

## Important Note

All the activities (3) in the DLA must be completed in their entirety before receiving credit for completion. Students are welcome to meet with a tutor if they need help, but please be aware that students might need a second appointment for review and signature in that case. If your instructor wants evidence of this completed DLA, return this form to him or her with the tutor’s signature included.

## Learning Outcomes

Through computer and other independent work, this activity will familiarize you with and help you create sentences with correct forms of the passive voice.

## Activities (approximately 1 hour)

Read the information, complete the activities that follow, and be prepared to discuss your answers when you meet with a tutor.

# Understanding Passive Voice

We use the passive voice when we want to focus on the object (the person or thing receiving the action) and NOT the agent (the person or thing doing the action). In other words, the person or thing doing the action is not the grammatical subject of the sentence. To understand this idea, let’s look at the differences between an active and a passive sentence.

| Active Sentence | Passive Sentence |
| --- | --- |
| Briana carried Joshua . | Joshua **was carried** by Briana . |

Notice that in the active sentence, the agent is at the beginning of the sentence. It is the subject. In the passive sentence, the object is at the beginning of the sentence. Also, notice that the verb changes from an active verb to a **passive verb**.

## Transitive vs. Intransitive Verbs

You can only make a passive sentence when you have a transitive verb. A transitive verb is not complete without a direct object.

| **Incomplete** | **Complete** |
| --- | --- |
| The boy broke. | The boy broke the window . |
| She will throw. | She will throw the ball . |
| The teacher gives every Friday. | The teacher gives a test every Friday. |

Intransitive verbs do not need a direct object.

* **Complete:** The train has arrived.

Because intransitive verbs do not take direct objects, only transitive verbs can be made passive.

| Active Sentence | Passive Sentence |
| --- | --- |
| The boy broke the window . | The window **was broken** by the boy . |

## How to Form the Passive Voice: { a form of be + past participle }

To form the passive voice:

1. You need a sentence with a transitive verb (a verb that takes an object ).

* Ex🡪 My neighbor watches my kids every day after school.

1. Put the object at the front of the sentence and the agent after the verb, adding by before it.

* Ex🡪 My kids watches by my neighbor every day after school.

1. You need a form of *be* (in any tense, with any modal, as a gerund, as an infinitive, etc.). When you are switching from an active sentence to a passive one, look at the active verb. The verb *be* must be in the same tense or form. The verb *be* in the passive sentence must agree with its new subject.

* Ex🡪 watches (simple present; agrees with my neighbor ) = **are** (simple present; agrees with my kids )

1. You need to put the main verb in its past participle form.

* Ex🡪 watch = **watched**

1. Final sentence: My kids **are watched** by my neighbor every day after school. \*\*

Remember, the verb *be* is in the same form as the active verb, and the main verb is in its past participle form.

The table below shows some examples. In the active sentences, the main verb is make. In the passive sentences, the form of be is:

* the same tense as make is in the active sentences
* followed by **made**, which is the **past participle** of make.

| Verb Tense | Active Sentence | Passive Sentence |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Simple Present | He makes breakfast. | Breakfast is **made** by him.\* |
| Present Progressive | He is making breakfast. | Breakfast is being **made** by him. |
| Simple Past | He made breakfast. | Breakfast was **made** by him. |
| Present Perfect | He has made breakfast. | Breakfast has been **made** by him. |
| Future | He will make breakfast. | Breakfast will be **made** by him. |
| Modal | He should make breakfast. | Breakfast should be **made** by him. |

\*Agents that are subject pronouns (*I, you, he, she, it, they, we*) in the active voice become object pronouns (*me, you, him, her, it, them, us*) in the passive voice.

Do not use the past form of the verb. You need to use the past participle, which sometimes looks like the past form, but other times it does not. Here are some verbs and their past participles:

| **Simple Form** | **Past Participle** | **Simple Form** | **Past Participle** | **Simple Form** | **Past Participle** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| awake | awoken | get | gotten | see | seen |
| be | been | give | given | sell | sold |
| become | become | go | gone | send | sent |
| begin | begun | grow | grown | sing | sung |
| blow | blown | have | had | sit | sat |
| break | broken | hear | heard | sleep | slept |
| buy | bought | keep | kept | speak | spoken |
| catch | caught | know | known | stand | stood |
| choose | chosen | lay | laid | steal | stolen |
| come | come | leave | left | sweep | swept |
| do | done | lie | lain | swim | swum |
| draw | drawn | lose | lost | take | taken |
| drink | drunk | make | made | teach | taught |
| drive | driven | mean | meant | tell | told |
| eat | eaten | meet | met | think | thought |
| fall | fallen | pay | paid | throw | thrown |
| feel | felt | ride | ridden | understand | understood |
| find | found | rise | risen | wear | worn |
| fly | flown | run | run | win | won |
| forget | forgotten | say | said | write | written |

## The Agent

We use the passive voice when the agent is either unknown or unimportant.

| Active Sentence | Passive Sentence |
| --- | --- |
| Someone has stolen my car . | My car **has been stolen.** (We don’t know who did it.) |

In the passive voice, we do not mention the agent when it is obvious or general.

| Active Sentence | Passive Sentence |
| --- | --- |
| The teacher will give the test at noon. | The test **will be given** at noon ~~by the teacher~~ .(It’s obvious that the teacher will give the test.) |
| People speak German in Austria. | German is spoken in Austria ~~by people~~ . (People is a general word.) |

Only mention the agent when it is **specific**. Introduce the agent with the word *by*.

| Active Sentence | Passive Sentence |
| --- | --- |
| John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln . | Abraham Lincoln **was assassinated** by John Wilkes Booth **.** (John Wilkes Booth is a specific person.) |

## Passive versus Active

How do you know if you need an active verb or a passive verb? First, look at the subject of the sentence. Did the subject do the action? If so, you need an active verb. If the subject did not do the action, you need a passive verb.

| Active Sentence | Passive Sentence |
| --- | --- |
| The dog bit the boys . (The dog did the action) | The boys **were bitten** by the dog **.** (The boys did not do the action.) |

# Activities

Check off each box once you have completed the activity.

## 1. Passive Voice Review

Review the information on this sheet. Then, answer the following questions.

| Write the answer. |
| --- |
| What is the passive voice? |
|  |
|  |
| How do you form the passive voice? |
|  |
|  |

## 2. Online Quiz

Go to http://tinyurl.com/PassiveVoiceDLAQuiz and take the [Passive Voice DLA Quiz](http://tinyurl.com/PassiveVoiceDLAQuiz). You must score at least 80% on the exercises before seeing a tutor. After you complete the task, **PLEASE ASK A LAB TUTOR OR FRONT DESK ATTENDANT TO PRINT THE PAGE THAT HAS YOUR SCORE. DO NOT EXIT THE PROGRAM UNTIL THIS PAGE HAS BEEN PRINTED (FREE OF CHARGE).** If you have any other questions, do not hesitate to ask a lab tutor.

## Choose 3a or 3b Below

## 3a. Review Your Own Writing

Collect some of your graded work. Find examples of active sentences that have transitive verbs (in different tenses!) and write them down. Then, make them passive.

| Write your sentences. |
| --- |
| 1. Active: |
| Passive: |
| 1. Active: |
| Passive: |
| 1. Active: |
| Passive: |

**If you do not have your own essay to work with, please complete the supplemental activity below (3b).**

## 3b. Passive Voice Sentence Practice

Look at the subject in the following sentences. Is it the agent or the object? Is it doing the action or not? Place the verbs in parentheses in the correct form—either active or passive.

| Subject | Verb | Rest of Sentence |
| --- | --- | --- |
| English | (teach) | at Mt. San Antonio College. |
| People | (speak) | Portuguese in Brazil. |

Following the steps on page 2 of this handout, change these active sentences into passive sentences. Mention the agent only when it is necessary.

| Write the answer. |
| --- |
| 1. People grow bananas in Ecuador. |
| 1. NASA will hire Glen. |
| 1. Sofia had already taken out the trash. |
| 1. Students may not take the test at another time. |

## 4. Review the DLA

Go to https://mtsac2.mywconline.com and use the [Mt. SAC Writing Center Appointment System](https://mtsac2.mywconline.com/) to make a DLA appointment, or sign-up to see a tutor on the “**Walk-in**” list in the Writing Center. During your session with a tutor, explain your work to demonstrate your understanding of the passive voice. Refer to your own graded writing (or the completed activity) and explain to the tutor the strategies that you used to improve your understanding and use of the passive voice in your writing.

Student’s Signature:

Tutor’s Signature

Date:

Date:

If you are an individual with a disability and need a greater level of accessibility for any document in The Writing Center or on The Writing Center’s website, please contact the Mt. SAC Accessible Resource Centers for Students, [access@mtsac.edu](mailto:access@mtsac.edu), (909) 274-4290.

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