



Writing Centre

Avoiding Passive Voice

Passive voice occurs when the **subject of the sentence is the receiver of the action**.

Form: Subject + (any form of) be + past participle of a verb.

My homework is done.

The man's nails were cut too short.

When do we use passive voice?

1. The subject of the action is unclear, unknown or unimportant.

Rules were made to be broken.

2. The focus of the sentence is on the person or thing affected by the action.

Ogopogo, a lake monster, has been seen by people since the 19th century.

3. Non-progressive passive adjectives describing a state of being.

The attached documents are important. (Being attached is the state of being of the documents.)

4. Idioms apply passive voice differently.

My phone was gone when I came back. (The phone disappeared.)

How to avoid passive voice in academic writing:

Change the sentence into the active voice by **specifying a subject as the doer of the action**.

1. Rubik's Cubes™ were purchased in great numbers in 1984. (passive)

→ *Teenagers purchased Rubik's Cubes™ in great numbers in 1984.* (active)

2. The box was damaged during transport. (passive)

→ *Jenna damaged the box during transport.* (active)

3. My cat was taken yesterday. (passive)

→ *Chris took my cat yesterday.* (active)

Active voice sentences tend to be less wordy, more precise and create stronger images.