

Topic: Active and Passive Voice

Definitions

Active voice: the subject in the sentence acts. The subject of the sentence does the acting or the behaving proposed in the sentence. The verb in the sentence is said to be in the active voice.

Passive voice: The subject in the sentence is acted upon. The subject receives the action of the verb. The verb is said to be in passive voice.

Explanation

The *active voice* describes a sentence in which the subject performs the action stated by the verb. It follows one of two easy to read constructions:

subject + verb	or	subject + verb + direct object.
<i>Ann reads.</i>		<i>Ann reads the book.</i>

The *passive voice* describes a sentence in which the subject is acted upon by the verb. The passive voice is effective only in certain sentences in which emphasis is placed upon the receiver of the action. It usually makes for a less clear, more wordy sentence.

The book is being read by Ann.

Examples

Passive voice: Four clams were eaten by Luke at dinner.

Active voice: Luke ate four clams at dinner.

Passive voice removes the focus from the named subject: "Luke."

Passive voice requires additional words: "were" and "by."

Passive: A happy song was sung by Mary.

Active: Mary sang a happy song.

Passive: Everyone was confused by the college calendar.

Active: The college calendar confused everyone.

Passive: The company rules were carefully followed by each employee.

Active: Each employee carefully followed the company rules.

Passive: Indoctrination was forced upon the citizens by the new government.

Active: The new government forced indoctrination upon the citizens.

Although passive voice is rarely effective, it is used when emphasis is placed upon the receiver of the action:

Effective passive voice: The robbery victim was identified by police.

Effective passive voice: Longtime champion Mohammed Ali was defeated by Joe Frazier.