

In order to understand active and passive voice, we must first take a quick look at basic sentence structure:

**The boy kicked the ball.**

The boy' is the SUBJECT of the sentence; he is performing the action.

'kicked' is the VERB

'The ball' is the OBJECT of the sentence; it is being acted upon.

**ACTIVE VOICE**

In active sentences, **the thing performing the action is the subject** of the sentence and the thing being acted upon is the object. Most sentences are active.

For Example:

**Sarah is eating an apple.**

Sarah is the one performing the action (of eating), and she is the subject of the sentence.

The apple is being acted upon (being eaten by Sarah), and comes after the verb.

More examples:

- » After training for weeks, Tom and Julia ran a marathon today.
- » We like chocolate with raisins.
- » That highly successful author will write a new book next year.

**PASSIVE VOICE**

In passive sentences, **the thing being acted upon is the subject** of the sentence & the thing doing the action is optionally included near the end of the sentence.

For Example:

**An apple is being eaten by Sarah**

Here the subject of the sentence is 'an apple', which is not performing the action (the eating), but is being acted upon.

Sarah is the one performing the action.

More examples:

- » The song was written by the school band with the help of their teacher.
- » The painting was stolen by a tall dark stranger.
- » Betty's efforts will be acknowledge by the committee on Friday.

How is this useful?

When writing a sentence, you may choose to **place emphasis** on different elements of the sentence. In the examples above, you can clearly see the difference: in the first sentence, the **focus** is very much on Sarah; in the second it is on the apple.

This is particularly useful in newspaper headlines. What is the difference between the following two headlines?

- ALIENS ATTACKED THE MUSEUM
- THE MUSEUM WAS ATTACKED BY ALIENS



**A QUICK WAY TO WORK OUT IF A SENTENCE IS WRITTEN IN THE ACTIVE OR PASSIVE VOICE:**

1. Find the main verb in the sentence.
2. Then find the subject and identify:
  - Is the subject performing the action? (ACTIVE)
  - Is the subject the thing being acted upon? (PASSIVE)

# IDENTIFYING THE SUBJECT → Worksheet 1

**ACTIVITY 1** For each of the following sentences, identify the subject by underlining it. Then identify whether the subject is performing the action or being acted upon.

**EXAMPLE:** The girl sitting in the corner is reading a strange novel. Performing the action

1. The malicious boy sneaked a cookie out of his brother's bag. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Connor and his sister are going to watch a movie tonight. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The scandal was revealed by the inquisitive and persistent reporter. \_\_\_\_\_
4. The table creaked under his bulky weight. \_\_\_\_\_
5. While reading, Sophie suddenly had a thought. \_\_\_\_\_
6. The food at the party was devoured by the hungry mob of teenagers. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Bill was sent a cryptic message from the government. \_\_\_\_\_
8. "Will you be finishing that burger?" \_\_\_\_\_
9. The rules must be obeyed by everyone, otherwise they are pointless. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Once again, Obama has been elected as president. \_\_\_\_\_
11. For some reason, Toby could not see the man standing in front of him. \_\_\_\_\_
12. All the boys in the class decided to skip school that day. \_\_\_\_\_
13. "Will the report be read by your boss?" \_\_\_\_\_
14. The man with the tall red hat told me a very interesting story. \_\_\_\_\_
15. His parents and his brother decided to throw him a surprise party. \_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY 2** Write FIVE of your own sentences. Each one must contain a subject which is performing the action of the sentence.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY 3** Write FIVE of your own sentences. Each one must contain a subject which is being acted upon.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## ACTIVE OR PASSIVE? → Worksheet 2

For each of the following sentences, label them as either **active** or **passive**, and identify the doer of the action.

Example: The spoon was left on the table by Jeremy.

→ Passive / Doer: Jeremy

1. The milk was knocked over by the willful cat.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Without thinking, Steven climbed the ladder quickly.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
3. This delicious cake was baked for us by Tom.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
4. My father is perpetually losing his keys and wallet.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
5. All of the tea had been drunk.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
6. The beautifully speckled egg was lain by a bluebird.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
7. My phone was taken away from me by Mr. Knowles.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Quietly, the hesitant child snuck out of the room.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Matthew and Jill decided to go to the dance together.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Bethany, being the boisterous girl that she is, was asked to leave the bus because she was making too much noise.  
→ \_\_\_\_\_ / Doer: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ACTIVE → PASSIVE VOICE → Worksheet 3

**ACTIVITY** All of the following sentences are written in the ACTIVE voice. Read them, and then re-write them in the PASSIVE form.

**EXAMPLE:** I always keep a block of butter in my fridge. A block of butter is always kept in my fridge.

1. You must eat your vegetables. \_\_\_\_\_
2. God loves us all equally. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Tom violently kicked the bucket. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Aunt Violet picks flowers for the church service. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Last week my old school friend sent me a letter. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. The builders are repairing the cracks in the walls. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. My brother cut my hair with the kitchen scissors. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. The teachers picked strawberries for us all to enjoy in class. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. The school bought thousands of books for the students this year. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Sandra drives her car in a reckless manner. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. A dog bit him while he was running in the field. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. My father will write a letter to the principal, complaining about the homework. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Are you writing a song for your friend? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. In the rainy season, the farmers plant the crops. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. They have informed him of his mother's death. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. What if he does not accept this plan? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY** All of the following sentences are written in the PASSIVE voice. Read them, and then re-write them in the ACTIVE form.

EXAMPLE: The flowers were planted by my mother. My mother planted the flowers

1. I was summoned by the court. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Your homework must be done. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The dog was found by my sister. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Letters were delivered by the postman at ten o'clock. \_\_\_\_\_
5. These offices were cleaned by a special company. \_\_\_\_\_
6. The umbrella was sold to my father by a strange young lady. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Bob was greeted by the enthusiastic crowd as he walked on stage. \_\_\_\_\_
8. The window was smashed by a sinister stranger. \_\_\_\_\_
9. This worksheet was created by our teacher, especially for us. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Everyday, the best cars are made here. \_\_\_\_\_
11. The dictionary is often used by our students. \_\_\_\_\_
12. The large tree in the garden will be cut down with a saw. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Last week, Tony was offered a place at the University with a full scholarship. \_\_\_\_\_
14. The door to the study had recently been opened. \_\_\_\_\_
15. Every year, Tim is voted the company's favorite employee. \_\_\_\_\_
16. Children are always being told to clean their rooms by their parents. \_\_\_\_\_