

Active and passive verbs

Description

Sentences have a structure of subject - verb - object, where the subject (or actor) performs an action (the verb) on an object.

Active verbs

Active verbs perform the actions of a subject within a sentence.

Use active verbs when you want to create interest and emphasize the action.

Use active verbs to give an order.

Passive verbs

Passive verbs describe the action done by the subject of a sentence. Passive verbs use a linking verb alongside the main verb. With passive verbs, it is often possible that the subject is not named.

Use passive verbs when you want to:

- Downplay the actor, for example when:
 - The actor is not known
 - The actor is relatively unimportant
 - The actor has already been named.
- Downplay the action, for example
 - To add focus to the object
 - When the action may seem hostile

Linking verbs

Linking verbs are neither active nor passive and act like an 'equals' (or inequality) sign.

By far the most common linking verb is 'to be'.

Use linking verbs to describe a 'state of being'.

Example

Active: *The man wrote the story.* Passive: *The story was written by the man.* Linking: *The story is good.*

Active: *The secret-service man shot the dark stranger.* Passive: *The dark stranger was shot.* [who did the shooting is not named]

Linking: *The dark stranger is not dead.*

Active (imperative): *Please help me succeed.* Passive (downplay action): *Errors will occur.* Passive (downplay actor): *The components were tested.* Passive (focus on object): *The president was bitten by the rat.*

Summary

Active and passive verbs may be mixed within sentences and used as appropriate.

Active verbs are generally clearer and add more interest than passive verbs.

Active verbs are common in speech and commands.

Because the subject need not be named with the passive verbs, this can lead to a lack of clarity and ambiguity. It also means that if the subject is not known,

Passive verbs are common in formal writing, such as academic, technical and business papers.

http://changingminds.org/techniques/language/speech_parts/active_passive_verbs.htm