



Using the Active and Passive Voice

Study Development Factsheet

During your university studies, you may encounter various writing styles. Mastering the ability to adjust tone and formality to suit the context is a valuable skill, which can be achieved by using either an active or passive voice in your sentences.

The Active Voice

The active voice is the most frequently used in writing and you may use it for introductions, discussions or when conducting critical analysis. Here are some examples of sentences in the active voice:

- The researcher interviewed 40 HR professionals.
- I placed the beaker on the scales.

In this structure, the subject (the doer) is at the start of the sentence, and the object is placed after the verb.

	Subject	Verb	Object	Preposition (where)
Sentence 1	The researcher	interviewed	40 HR professionals	
Sentence 2	I	placed	the beaker	on the scales

When to use the active voice

- To emphasise the subject of the sentence.
- To assign ownership to an action.
- To establish an engaging and personal tone.
- To be concise and direct.



The Passive Voice

The passive voice is frequently used in academic writing, especially when writing reports. It is effective in focusing on a process, such as a methods section or a scientific report. Here are some examples of sentences in the passive voice:

- *40 HR professionals were interviewed.*
- *The beaker was placed on the scales.*

In this structure, the subject (the doer) is omitted, and the object is placed at the beginning of the sentence.

	Object	Verb
Sentence 1	40 HR professionals	were interviewed
Sentence 2	The beaker	was placed

When to use the passive voice

- When the subject is unknown.
- To create an impersonal tone.
- To emphasise an action or result.
- To create a formal and objective tone.

Activity: Is it active or passive?

- 1) Read the sentences below, and write next to them whether you think they are active (A) or passive (P).

Active (A) or
passive (P)

The research paper was widely discussed at international conferences, and several key findings were adopted.

She meticulously analysed thousands of DNA samples, uncovering previously unknown gene sequences.

Colleagues around the world praised her work, citing it as a major advancement in the study of human evolution.

The discoveries were acknowledged as a significant contribution to the field.

- 2) Bonus task:

Can you write the active sentences into the passive form, and the passive sentences into the active form?