

# Passive Voice

## What is Passive Voice?

It is funny that you should ask that question! **Mr. Grammar was asked that very question by a student.** The previous sentence is actually an example of passive voice. Let's look at that sentence together.

Mr. Grammar was asked that very question by a student.

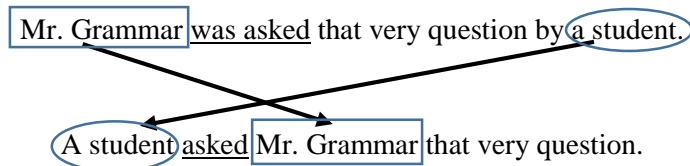
The subject doing the action, in this case a student, is at the end of the sentence *after* the verb. The recipient of the action, the object, is at the start of the sentence. A student asked the question, not Mr. Grammar. So, how do we change it?

## Changing Passive Voice to Active Voice

In *passive voice*, the subject receives the action.

In *active voice*, the subject does the action.

So, let's break our sentence into parts by drawing a circle around the subject, a box around the object, and underlining the verb. After identifying the parts of the sentence, let's change our example sentence from a passive one to an active one by making sure our subject does the action.



In the corrected sentence, the subject doing the action, a student, comes before the verb, and the object receiving the action, Mr. Grammar, comes after the verb. The sentence is now in the active voice!

## Quick Ways to Check for the Passive Voice

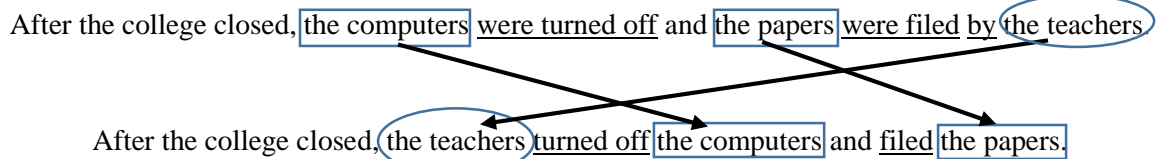
There are two main clues that let you know you may have a passive voice sentence.

- 1) A helping verb such as *is, was, were, have been, will be* followed by **a verb in the past tense**. In our sample sentence, the clue was “was asked.”
- 2) The word **by** might also be a sign of the passive voice. In our sample sentence, the clue was “by a student.”

Let's look at a slightly more complicated example sentence. Remember to check for passive voice clues and to bring the subject of the sentence before the verb.

After the college closed, the computers were turned off and the papers were filed by the teachers.

In this sentence, we see that “the teachers” are the subject because they are the ones doing the action. We can also see examples of both our passive voice clues and more than one object, “the computers” and “the papers.”



This time, we moved the teachers *before* the first passive voice phrase, “were turned off,” to make this sentence active. Still not sure? No worries! Let's work through some exercises together!

## Let's Practice!

Before deciding whether or not these sentences are in passive or active voice, remember what we just reviewed. Draw a circle around the subject of the sentence, a box around the object of the sentence, underline the verb, and cross out any passive voice clues (helping verbs such as *is, are, was, were* and the word *by*). Then, if necessary, change the sentence from passive to active voice. Be careful: some of the sentences may already be in the active voice and not need changing.

### Example:

- 1) The new poster was designed by Megan and Rachel.

Megan and Rachel designed the new poster.

### Practice Sentences:

- 1) The writing center was redecorated by Rachel.
- 2) Your grade was affected by the number of mistakes in the paper.
- 3) The students celebrated the end of the semester.
- 4) In the new *Star Wars* movie, Han Solo is killed by Kylo Ren.
- 5) The ink was restocked and the paper jam was cleared by the technician.
- 6) Before the stores closed, new iPhones were purchased by excited customers.

**Answers:**

- 1) The writing center was redecorated by Rachel.

Rachel redecorated the writing center.

- 2) Your grade was affected by the number of mistakes in the paper.

The number of mistakes in your paper affected your grade.

- 3) The students celebrated the end of the semester. = already correct

- 4) In the new *Star Wars* movie, Han Solo is killed by Kylo Ren.

In the new *Star Wars* movie, Kylo Ren killed Han Solo.

- 5) The ink was restocked and the paper jam was cleared by the technician.

The technician restocked the ink and cleared the paper jam.

- 6) Before the stores closed, new iPhones were purchased by excited customers.

Before the stores closed, excited customers purchased new iPhones.