

## Active and Passive Voice

**Friendship:** You are walking on a sidewalk with a friend and a red shoe falls on your head.

*The shoe was [passive] thrown out that open window.*

(If your friend saw who threw the shoe, and they make this *passive voice* statement they are speaking in a wordy and unclear way.)

*A small child [active] threw the shoe out that open window.*

(If your friend makes this *active voice* statement, the situation suddenly makes sense, and you will both likely laugh and remember your own childhoods.)

**Politics:** Politicians often deliberately speak in a wordy and unclear way.

*Funds will be found for the clean-up of the Sydney tar ponds.*

(In this *passive voice* sentence the politician is taking no direct responsibility since they are not saying who will actually be doing the clean-up.)

*Our government will find funds for the clean-up.*

(In this *active voice* statement the politician makes clear who is doing what, but a politician may wish to avoid such clarity.)

**Science:** The results of experiments usually need to be at the forefront of scientific writing, rather than who obtained the results.

*As part of the environmental research project blood samples were taken from people living near the industrial area.*

(*Passive voice* suitable for scientific writing.)

*I took blood samples from people living near the industrial area as part of the environmental research project.*

(This is an *active voice* statement suitable for discussing your work with your friends, but may not be appropriate for the writing of your scientific report.)

**Tragedy:** Difficult choices to be made.

*The jet crash was seen from as far away as Peggy's Cove.*

(*Passive voice*.)

*Some residents near the Peggy's Cove area saw the jet crash.*

(*Active voice*.)

Is your writing focusing on the residents as active doers or on the jet crash that was observed by unnamed people? Your choice of words in this case depends entirely on the purpose of your writing.

**Academics:** The clarity and conciseness of the *active voice* will usually produce the strongest writing. In an *active voice* sentence the subject acts in a way that is clear to the reader. In a *passive voice* sentence the subject passively receives an action, in a way that may obscure who is doing what.

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