Active/Passive Constructions

Writers use active constructions to reduce wordiness and achieve an impact. (active)
Active constructions are used by writers to reduce wordiness and achieve an impact. (passive with agent)
Active constructions are used to reduce wordiness and achieve an impact. (passive without agent)

Writers use passive constructions to downplay a sense of agency. (active)
Passive constructions are used by writers to downplay a sense of agency. (passive with agent)
Passive constructions are used to downplay a sense of agency. (passive without agent)

Choose active or passive as appropriate

In general, <u>choose the active voice</u> to produce a vigorous style.
- *The active voice is chosen by writers who prefer a vigorous style.(12 words)*
- *Writers who prefer a vigorous style choose the active voice. (10 words)*

Choose the active voice to foreground agency or responsibility.
- *The Writing Resource Centre helped him with his essay.*

<u>Choose the passive voice</u> to remove attention from the agent, when you don't know or don't want to reveal the agent, or when the agent is less important.
- *The student was bullied on-line.*
- *The professor was given a poor evaluation.*
- *Alice Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.*
- *active alternative: Alice Munro won the Nobel Prize for Literature.*

Scientific and business writing

Passive voice is often preferred in scientific writing to keep the focus on an experiment and results rather than on the experimenters.
- *The bacteria were isolated and observed for three days.*

The passive voice is also preferred in some business writing to appear impersonal and objective.
- *The sales target for this quarter has not been achieved.*

In general, be consistent in using either active or passive constructions.
- *Academic writers <u>prefer</u> to work within the conventions of their field. Discipline-specific language, genres and formats <u>are favoured</u>. → Academic writers <u>prefer</u> to work within the conventions of their field. <u>They favour</u> discipline-specific language, genres and formats.*