**Unit 2 In-Class Activities: Active and Passive Voice**

Before you can purposefully structure your writing in the active (or passive) voice, you must be able to understand which elements of each sentence comprise the **subject** and object. Once you are able to do this, you will be able to re-order your sentences to write in the style that is most appropriate for the situation.

Recall from the pre-class activity that in the active voice, the **subject** of the sentence performs the action on the object, whereas in the passive voice, the **subject** of the sentence is acted upon (it effectively *does* nothing itself).

**A handy hint: let the verb point the way**

To know what the action in the sentence is, just focus on how the verb (the *doing* word) explains the content in the sentence. For example, consider the following sentence.

“Pests destroy crops.”

1: Look for the **verb** first

2: Find the **subject** and object by considering whether the action in the verb is being actively or passively performed.

“**Pests** **destroy** crops.”

In the above example, the action of the **verb** (from ‘to destroy’) is being actively performed (these pests are *doing* the destroying in this sentence). This is therefore an active voice sentence.

For it to be passive, the action of the verb would have to be performed on the subject (the pests would not directly be *doing* the destroying). For example: “**My crops** were **destroyed** by pests.”

**Activity 1 (work alone or together, 10 minutes)**

For each of the five sentences below, identify the **verb** before also identifying the **subject** and object. Then use this information to decide whether the sentence is written in the active or passive voice. You can work alone or with a partner in this activity.

**1:** Over 60 million years ago, a very large meteorite crashed into Earth.

**2:** The exact location of the impact is still debated by some scientists.

**3:** However, most experts think the crash site is in Mexico.

**4:** The extinction of the dinosaurs is attributed by many palaeontologists to the impact.

**5:** Dinosaurs would have been affected by sudden changes in temperature, and meteorologists recently showed that the earth’s climate changed considerably at this time.

**Activity 2 (work alone or together, 15 minutes)**

Below are five more sentences, but this time they are all written in the passive voice. Re-write them in the active voice and try to reduce the length of the sentences by at least a few words in each case (one benefit of using the active voice).

1: The mice were kept in controlled conditions by the experimenters before they were removed from their cages and placed on an exercise wheel.

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2: Each mouse was weighed by the same experimenters before and after it was placed on the exercise wheel.

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3: After 12 weeks had passed, each mouse was randomly placed in one of two treatment groups; in all cases, a die was rolled by an experimenter for each mouse and if it landed on an even number the mouse was placed in the group that received a pill.

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4: If the die landed on an odd number, the mouse was placed in the treatment group that received a placebo, which was designed by the research team to look like the pill.

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5: Following another 12 weeks in their different treatment groups, each mouse was weighed again by the experimenters and average weight gain (g) was calculated by using a calculator.

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**\* Note: There will be a brief class regroup at this stage to discuss the answers to Activities 1 and 2 \***

**Activity 3 (work alone, 5 minutes)**

Sentences written in the active voice generally grab attention more effectively than those written in the passive voice. When people first write essays, however, they typically produce a rough draft that features all their ideas in some form of ordered chaos, rather than worrying too much about their grammar. They then edit their work to make sure the sentences, paragraphs and transitions (**remember Unit 1**) fit together to make a coherent argument.

Now it is time to begin thinking about editing from the perspective of writing in the style of voice that best suits the situation. To highlight the importance of this, try to write 5-6 sentences about the best science lecture you ever attended. You only have a few minutes to do this, so just write down your sentences without thinking too much about the grammar.

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**Activity 4 (work together, 5 minutes)**

Choose a partner (or work in groups of 3 to make sure nobody is on their own) and swap your worksheets. Now work through each sentence and highlight whether it is written in the active or passive voice. When you are finished, hand it back to the author and discuss with him/her whether you both agree on the decisions you have made.

**Activity 5 (work alone, 10 minutes)**

Once you have agreed which style of voice you have written each sentence in, try to re-write them in the opposite style. So, for example, if you have written your first sentence in the passive voice, re-write it in the active voice to practice using both styles (Note: This is just to make you more comfortable in using both).

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**Activity 6 (optional, work alone)**

By now, you should have one active and one passive version of each sentence. Spend some time looking at each pair and decide which style is most appropriate. This little exercise should hopefully show you the importance of re-reading and editing your sentences from this perspective to make sure they each have maximum impact.

**For more help with the active and passive voice**

If you are still confused about the differences between the active and passive voice, you are encouraged to view the helpful guide on this subject published by the Purdue Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/01/>).

**Suggested solutions**

**Activity 1**

For each of the five sentences below, the **subject** appears in bold text and the object in blue. The verb is in red. The correct designation of the sentence (active or passive) appears at the end.

1: Over 60 million years ago, a **very large** **meteorite** **crashed** into Earth. **ACTIVE.**

2: The **exact location of the impact** is still **debated** by some scientists. **PASSIVE.**

3: However, **most** **experts** **think** the crash site is in Mexico. **ACTIVE.**

4: The **extinction of the dinosaurs** is **attributed** by many palaeontologists to the impact. **PASSIVE.**

5: **Dinosaurs** would have been **affected** by sudden changes in temperature, and **meteorologists** recently **showed** that the earth’s climate changed considerably at this time. **PASSIVE FIRST, ACTIVE SECOND.**

**Activity 2**

Sample solutions in the active voice appear in red text below (with the reduction in words also given as a hint as to what students should be aiming for). Please note there are multiple potentially correct answers here, but the important thing is to ensure each sentence is written in the active voice and in fewer words than the passive prompt.

1: The mice were kept in controlled conditions by the experimenters before they were removed from their cages and placed on an exercise wheel.

Experimenters kept the mice in controlled cage conditions before placing them on an exercise wheel. (Word reduction = 8).

2: Each mouse was weighed by the same experimenters before and after it was placed on the exercise wheel.

The same experimenters weighed mice before and after placing them on the exercise wheel. (Word reduction = 4)

3: After 12 weeks had passed, each mouse was randomly placed in one of two treatment groups; in all cases, a die was rolled by an experimenter for each mouse and if it landed on an even number the mouse was placed in the group that received a pill.

After 12 weeks, experimenters randomly placed each mouse in one of two treatment groups; experimenters rolled a die and when it landed on an even number they placed the mouse in a group that received a pill. (Word reduction = 11).

4: If the die landed on an odd number, the mouse was placed in the treatment group that received a placebo, which was designed by the research team to look like the pill.

When experimenters rolled an odd number they placed mice in the group that received a placebo they had designed to look like the pill. (Word reduction = 8).

5: Following another 12 weeks in their different treatment groups, each mouse was weighed again by the experimenters and average weight gain (g) was calculated by using a calculator.

After 12 more weeks, experimenters weighed each mouse and used a calculator to assess average weight gain (g). (Word reduction = 10).