Active and Passive Voice, Answer key/Teaching Tips

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1.   When the Phillies's Shane Victorino overran him, third base was stolen by Johnny Damon.

This sentence is written in the passive voice; the active voice makes more sense.

**Active Voice Response 1 (preferred):** Johnny Damon stole third base when the Phillies's Shane Victorino overran him.

**Active Voice Response 2:** When the Phillies's Shane Victorino overran him, Johnny Damon stole third base.

**Teaching Tip:** The judicious use of the active voice or the passive voice requires thought. Impress on students that it is up to them, as writers, to determine when the active voice makes sense and when the passive voice makes sense.

In this sentence, the focus, the agent, the IMPORTANCE is carried by Johnny Damon.

**Remind** students that in active voice sentences, the agent (the one who does the action) is the grammatical subject.

2.  A happy Thanksgiving is wished by me for everyone.

This sentence is written in the passive voice; the active voice makes more sense.

**Active Voice Response:** I wish everyone a happy Thanksgiving.

**Teaching Tip:** For American students, this sentence is fairly simple. “I” is the agent, and should be the grammatical subject of the active voice construction.

3. The attorney general indicted the notorious gangster, Al Capone, for federal income tax evasion.

This sentence is written in the active voice; the passive voice makes more sense.

**Passive Voice Response 1 (preferred):** The notorious gangster, Al Capone, was indicted for federal income tax evasion.

**Passive Voice Response 2:** The notorious gangster, Al Capone, was indicted for federal income tax evasion by the attorney general.

**Passive Voice Response 3:** Al Capone was indicted for federal income tax evasion.

**Teaching Tip:** This sentence forces students to choose. They must determine what the focus of the sentence should be. Should it be the attorney general? Should it be Al Capone? Most readers would find that the focus should be Al Capone. In fact, the agent seems insignificant compared to the receiver of the action. The trailing prepositional phrase (“by the attorney general”) is best left out.

4.  The student services committee forwarded revised disciplinary procedures to the campus president.

This sentence is in the active voice; the passive voice makes more sense.

**Passive Voice Response 1 (preferred):** The revised disciplinary procedures were forwarded to the campus president.

**Passive Voice Response 2:** The revised disciplinary procedures were forwarded to the campus president by the student services committee.

**Teaching Tip:** Again, students must discern that the “revised disciplinary procedures” carry more weight than the student services committee. It’s a judgment call. Some students may even put the emphasis on the campus president as in

**Active Voice Response:** The campus president received the revised disciplinary procedures from the student services committee.

5. Six Thousand shares of Disney stock were bought by Jenny Allen when she was only nineteen.

This sentence is in the passive voice; the active voice makes more sense.

**Active Voice Response (preferred):** Jenny Allen bought six thousand shares of Disney stock when she was only nineteen.

**Teaching Tip:** The focus really should be on the agent, a young woman who had enough foresight (and money!) to buy 6000 shares of Disney at age 19.

6. People can view the dazzling meteor shower from the observation tower at the planetarium.

This sentence is in the active voice; the passive voice makes more sense.

**Passive Voice Response 1 (preferred):** The dazzling meteor shower can be viewed from the observation tower at the planetarium.

**Passive Voice Response 2:** The dazzling meteor shower can be viewed from the observation tower.

**Teaching Tip:** I like to point out that the focus should be the “dazzling meteor shower.” Who (or what) else could “view” it, if not people? Again, although the word “people” is the agent, the focus should be on the recipient of the action, the meteor shower.

7. The acceptance letter from Harvard was received by Jenny Arteaga last Tuesday.

This sentence is in the passive voice; the active voice makes more sense.

**Active Voice Response (preferred):** Jenny Atreaga received the acceptance letter from Harvard last Tuesday.

8. An invitation to Francis Suarez’s victory party was received by Mr. Packer, the state party chairman.

This sentence is in the passive voice; the active voice makes more sense.

**Active Voice Response 1 (preferred):** Mr. Packer, the state party chairman, received an invitation to Francis Suarez’s victory party.

**Active Voice Response 2:** Mr. Packer received an invitation to Francis Suarez’s victory party.

**Teaching Tip:** Although the idea is not related to active/passive voice, some students will want to omit the appositive “the state party chairman” from the revised sentence. I tell them that using an appositive is a good way of defining a term within the flow of the sentence.

9. The Baseball Writers Association of America named Joe Mauer, the Minnesota Twins’ catcher who led the American League with a .365 batting average, MVP for 2009.

This sentence is in the active voice; the passive voice makes more sense.

**Passive Voice Response 1 (preferred):** Joe Mauer, the Minnesota Twins’ catcher who led the American League with a .365 batting average, was named MVP for 2009.

**Passive Voice Response 2:** Joe Mauer was named MVP for 2009.

**Teaching Tip:** It always surprises me that so few students follow baseball. In a class of 30, at most two (usually none!) will know who Joe Mauer is. Oh well. The focus of this sentence should clearly not be “The Baseball Writers Association of America”; it should be Joe Mauer.