

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.

## Active and Passive Voice, Worksheet 2, 16 Exercises

1. The window was broken.

**Active Voice Response:** Jim broke the window.

**Teaching Tip:** Well, does the writer want to inform the reader about who broke the window? If so, then the active voice response works well. If not, then stick with the passive.

In general, though, the easiest sentence structure for speakers of English to understand is the Subject + Verb + Object (S + V + O) structure, where the subject is the doer of the action (the agent).

For the sake of simplicity and readability, writers should stick with the active voice unless they have a compelling reason to use passive.

2. Whenever my family went camping, the emergency flashlight was left behind.

**Active Voice Response:** Whenever my family went camping, my brother always forgot the emergency flashlight.

**Teaching Tip:** In the original passive voice, the sentence focuses on the flashlight, while the active voice sentence focuses on "my brother." It's a matter of choice. The active voice response sounds more intimate and real than the passive voice, but that's a subtle matter of opinion.

3. Marlon Byrd of the Chicago Cubs was knocked down by Alfredo Aceves with a hard, inside fastball.

**Active Voice Response:** Alfredo Acevez knocked down Marlon Byrd of the Chicago Cubs with a hard, inside fastball.

**Teaching Tip:** Use active or passive voice, depending on the focus of the sentence.

4. Fifteen oak seedlings were planted by Mrs. Vigil's second grade class.

**Active Voice Response:** Mrs. Vigil's second grade class planted fifteen oak seedlings.

**Teaching Tip:** When discussing young children, writers usually make the children the focus. Therefore, the active voice response works well here.

5. Biological diversity is considered a crucial survival issue by Professor Edward O. Wilson of Harvard University.

**Active Voice Response:** Professor Edward O. Wilson of Harvard University considers biological diversity a crucial survival issue.

**Teaching Tip:** We could go either way with this sentence, but the focus really seems to be on Professor Edward O. Wilson. If that is indeed the case, then the active voice response works well. If not, then stick with the passive. Students may even replace "Professor Edward O. Wilson" with "prominent scholars."

**Passive Voice Response:** Biological diversity is considered a crucial survival issue by prominent scholars.

6. The cashier was commended by the branch manager for her tactful handling of an irate customer.

**Active Voice Response (focus on branch manager):** The branch manager commended the cashier for her tactful handling of an irate customer.

**Teaching Tip:** The original passive voice construction places the focus on the cashier. The active voice response places the focus on the branch manager. In fact students may opt to eliminate the agent in the original passive voice:

**Passive Voice Response (eliminating the agent):** The cashier was commended ~~by the branch manager~~ for her tactful handling of an irate customer.

7. The wet umbrella was removed from the table by the server.

**Active Voice Response:** The server removed the wet umbrella from the table.

**Passive Voice Response (eliminating the agent):** The wet umbrella was removed from the table ~~by the server~~.

8. The police officer was angered by Jason when Jason refused to present his identification card.

**Active Voice Response:** Jason angered the police officer when Jason refused to present his identification card.

**Passive Voice Response (eliminating the agent):** The police officer was angered ~~by Jason~~ when Jason refused to present his identification card.

9. The 2010 - 2011 budget was not approved by the appropriations committee.

**Active Voice Response:** The appropriations committee did not approve **the** 2010 - 2011 budget.

**Passive Voice Response (preferred):** The 2010 - 2011 budget was not approved.

**Teaching Tip:** Most readers won't care who did not approve the budget. The issue, and therefore the focus of the sentence, is the 2010 - 2011 budget. In this case, the passive voice works better than the active.

10. The playground area was left in a shambles after the birthday party.

**Active Voice Response: The children left** the playground area in a shambles after the birthday party.

**Teaching Tip:** Again, most readers find it easier to understand a Sub. + Verb + Object structure (where the subject is the agent) than passive voice. The active voice response makes it clear who left the playground area in a shambles.

11. Dirk Nowitzki was guarded by LeBron James during the third quarter of Wednesday night's championship game.

**Active Voice Response:** LeBron James guarded Dirk Nowitzki during the third quarter of Wednesday night's championship game.

**Teaching Tip:** Unless the writer wants to focus on Dirk Nowitzki, there's really no good reason to use the passive. The active voice is strong, clear, and easy to understand.

12. Five hundred pounds of illegal drugs were confiscated by the Coast Guard in January of 2011.

**Active Voice Response: The Coast Guard confiscated** five hundred pounds of illegal drugs in January of 2011.

**Teaching Tip:** The active voice construction is easier to read, but the passive puts the focus on the illegal drugs. What is the intent of the author?

13. Thirty-seven migrants were found by Homeland Security inside a small van trying to cross the border in the middle of the desert.

**Active Voice Response (preferred -- maybe):** Homeland Security **found thirty-seven migrants** inside a small van trying to cross the border in the middle of the desert.

**Teaching Tip:** If the focus of the sentence is on the 37 migrants, then encourage students to leave the sentence in the passive voice. However, if the focus is on Homeland Security, then the active voice works better.

14. The Toyota Prius is manufactured in Japan by Japanese workers.

**Active Voice Response (May not be the best choice.):** Japanese workers manufacture the Toyota Prius.

**Passive Voice Response:** The Toyota Prius is manufactured ~~in Japan~~ by Japanese workers.

**Passive Voice Response:** The Toyota Prius is manufactured in Japan ~~by Japanese workers~~.

**Teaching Tip:** The focus of the sentence seems to be on the car brand itself and not the nationality of the workers who manufacture it. Encourage students to think about the purpose of the sentence and choose active or passive voice depending on the focus. Sometimes the passive voice serves the rhetorical purpose of the writer better than the active voice.

15. A bill to force state employees to contribute to the retirement plan was signed by Governor Rick Scott yesterday.

**Active Voice Response: Yesterday, Governor Rick Scott signed** a bill to force state employees to contribute to the retirement plan.

**Revision: Yesterday, Governor Rick Scott signed** a bill **that requires** state employees to contribute to the retirement plan.

**Teaching Tip:** The active voice response works well if the focus is on the governor; if the focus is on the bill, then students should leave the sentence in the passive voice. The revision "softens" the rhetoric somewhat by rephrasing "to force" into "that requires." Students should determine what focus and tone they want to create through the different choices.

16. Victor was given the science award by the selection committee for his outstanding project on salt-water intrusion in the Biscayne aquifer.

**Passive Voice Response 1 (preferred):** Victor was given the science award ~~by the selection committee~~ for his outstanding project on salt-water intrusion in the Biscayne aquifer.

**Passive Voice Response 2: The science award** was given to Victor ~~by the selection committee~~ for his outstanding project on salt-water intrusion in the Biscayne aquifer.

**Active Voice Response (not really appropriate): The selection committee gave** Victor the science award for his outstanding project on salt-water intrusion in the Biscayne aquifer.

**Teaching Tip:** Both passive voice constructions are better than the active voice because the passive voice puts the emphasis of the sentence on Victor OR on the award. That's the correct focus. Active voice puts the focus on the selection committee, which is important, but not really the item of interest in most contexts.