UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

# Making Passive sentences Active

## Directions: Rewrite each of these sentences in the active voice.

1. The computer was smashed by the young woman when it lost her research essay.
2. To the students’ delight, the cafeteria in Usdan was destroyed by a major blizzard.
3. Tiktok is used by students as a means of making funny videos to share with their friends.
4. The window in my friend’s dorm was struck by a wild turkey.
5. Internet blogs are read by many students.
6. After protests by students against the incredibly bad cafeteria food, the administration expanded Einstein’s.
7. Harry was temporarily paralyzed by Voldemort’s curse.
8. A penalty kick was stopped by the Brandeis goalie, so they won the state soccer championship.
9. Starbucks coffee is loved by many people.
10. The students were annoyed by the tedious grammar exercises given to them by their instructor.

Credit: Lisa Rourke and Robert Cochran, University Writing Program

The Brandeis University Writing Program, including the Writing Center, First-Year Writing, and Writing in the Majors, offers support for writing throughout the community, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

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# Making Passive sentences Active: Procedures

Teaching students to write in the active voice will significantly strengthen their essays because sentences written in the active voice often have much more impact than those written in the passive voice. In fact, I think that it’s the single most important thing you can teach students about style.

I begin by asking what an active verb is (a verb that conveys an action). I then go around the class and have each student name an active verb. I follow up by asking what a passive verb is (any verb that is acted upon)—you can identify passive verbs because they are paired with a form of the verb “to be” (i.e., am, is, are, was, were, has, have, had etc…).

As an example of the passive voice I offer the following sentence: “The dog was hit by a car.” I then ask students to make it active: “A car hit the dog.” It is usually clear that the second sentence has more impact than the first.

Finally, I put students in pairs and have them make the passive sentences on the next page active. It typically takes about 5 minutes. I then go around the room and review the sentences.

It is especially effective to do this lesson on the same day that you hold a peer review session because following the exercise you can ask students to find a passive sentence in their essay and change it to active.

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# Making Passive sentences Active: instructor Notes

1. The computer was smashed by the young woman when it lost her research essay.
   1. *The young woman smashed the computer when it lost her research essay.*
2. To the students’ delight, the cafeteria in Usdan was destroyed by a major blizzard.
   1. *To the students’ delight, a major blizzard destroyed the cafeteria in Usdan.*
3. Tiktok is used by students as a means of making funny videos to share with their friends.
   1. *Students use Tiktok as a means of making funny videos to share with their friends.*
4. The window in my friend’s dorm was struck by a wild turkey.
   1. *A wild turkey struck the window in my friend’s dorm.*
5. Internet blogs are read by many students.
   1. *Many students read internet blogs.*
6. After protests by students against the incredibly bad cafeteria food, the administration expanded Einstein’s.
   1. *The administration expanded Einstein’s after students protested against the incredibly bad cafeteria food.*
7. Harry was temporarily paralyzed by Voldemort’s curse.
   1. *Voldemort’s curse temporarily paralyzed Harry.*
8. A penalty kick was stopped by the Brandeis goalie, so they won the state soccer championship.
   1. *The Brandeis goalie stopped the penalty kick, so they won the state soccer championship.*
9. Starbucks coffee is loved by many people.
   1. *Many people love Starbucks coffee.*
10. The students were annoyed by the tedious grammar exercises given to them by their instructor.
    1. *The instructor annoyed the students by giving them tedious grammar exercises.*

Handout: Lisa Rourke and Robert Cochran, University Writing Program