How to Survive…..
Active and Passive Voice

In English, we can choose either ACTIVE voice or PASSIVE voice. The difference is in word order and sentence focus.

Active voice

I walk my dog every day.
(agent)(verb)(recipient)(circumstance)

In the active voice, the agent (doer of the action) comes before the verb and the recipient (receiver of the action) afterwards.

Passive voice

My dog is walked (by me) every day.
(recipient)(verb)(actor) circumstance

In the passive voice the recipient is before the verb and the agent afterwards.

When to use active or passive

Use the active voice when:

• you want to emphasise the agent or doer of the action
• the agent is important and known

Use the passive voice when:

• you want to emphasise the recipient of the action
• the agent is unimportant or unknown

To change from active to passive:

1. put the recipient BEFORE the verb
2. put the agent AFTER the verb and add the word “by” (or omit the agent altogether)
3. CHANGE the verb to a form of “be” plus the past participle
Active voice makes your writing

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<th>Clearer</th>
<th>More lively</th>
<th>More direct</th>
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For these reasons, **use the active form where possible**. Use the passive only when you particularly want to emphasise or focus on the recipient of the action or when the agent is unknown (as in experimental or process writing).

**Avoid these traps:**

- Using the passive voice to be deliberately vague or misleading

**Examples:**

- It is argued that….
- Brown (2004) argues that….
- Your complaint is being dealt with.
- Ms White (9427 3516) is dealing with your complaint.

**Other useful resources:**

**Books:**

**Websites:**
- resowl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_actpass.html
- Jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/grammar/act-pass.htm
- webster.commnet.edu/grammar/passive.htm

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