

ACTIVE vs PASSIVE VOICE

Passive Voice

Def: the subject *receives* the action

Ex: The coolant pumps *were destroyed* by a surge of power.

Reasons to avoid it:

It's wordy and so dilutes your prose.

It obscures the agent in the sentence.

It's boring to read.

Reasons to use it, sparingly and purposefully:

when you *need* to hide the agent of the sentence

when you want to emphasize the receiver of the action.

Ex: As the time for harvest approaches, the tobacco plants *are sprayed* with a chemical to retard the growth of suckers.

Active Voice

Def: the subject *performs* the action

Ex: A surge of power *destroyed* the coolant pumps.

Reasons to use it:

It makes your prose concise and energetic.

It emphasizes the agent of the sentence—who's doing what—making your prose easier to read.

Avoiding Passive Voice

An easy exercise: Go through your writing and CIRCLE *all* "to be" verbs (am, is, are, was, were). Most or many of these are likely to be parts of passive voice constructions. Revise these structures to make them active voice: put the *agent* of the action into the subject of your sentence.