



# WRITING CENTER

## Active and Passive Voice

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### ACTIVE VOICE VS. PASSIVE VOICE

**Note:** In the examples below:

- The subject is **bold**.
- The verb is underlined.

#### ACTIVE VOICE

**Active voice** occurs when the subject of a sentence is the active actor of the sentence. This is accomplished by using verbs that express action emphatically and vigorously.

Good verbs in active voice bring energy to your writing. The active voice is therefore usually preferred by instructors, editors, and most importantly, readers.

**Examples:** **Hurricane Katrina** destroyed many homes and businesses.

**JCCC students** ainted the mural on the college campus.

#### PASSIVE VOICE

**Passive voice** occurs when the subject of a sentence is being acted upon. This is accomplished by combining a form of the **be** verb (**be, am, is, was, were, being, been**) with the past participle of the main verb.

**Examples:** Many **homes and businesses** were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

**The mural** on the college campus was ainted by JCCC students.

**Note:** When a subject receives the action instead of doing it, the sentence lacks strength, so passive voice is usually not preferred by instructors, editors, and most importantly, readers.

### THE BEST TIME TO USE THE PASSIVE VOICE

Passive voice does have certain legitimate functions in writing. Passive voice is appropriate when emphasizing the receiver of the action, or minimizing the importance of the actor.

**Examples:** Many **Aborigines** of Australia have been forced off their lands by colonists. *This emphasizes the receiver of the action: **Aborigines**.*

Early in the growing season, the **crop** is sprayed with a pesticide to resist damaging insects. *This emphasizes **crop**, not **insects**.*