

Basic Tips for Using the Active Voice

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Many professors in various fields such as English and the sciences usually prefer students to use the active voice. It provides a concise tone that strengthens the writer's work and eliminates extra words that can clutter ideas. The passive voice does serve its purpose in academics every now and then, but the active voice tends to maintain popularity.

According to Diana Hacker, the main rule for using the active voice is to "choose an active verb and pair it with a subject that names the person or thing doing the action" (231). When you do this, the subject directly performs the action which creates a stronger and more concise sentence.

Active Voice: The police (subject) chased (verb) the suspect.

The passive voice usually emerges when you use the verb "be" and its other forms such as "am," "is," "are," "was," "were," and so on. When using these verbs, the word "by" normally accompanies them which adds extra words to your sentences. When this happens, "the action is performed upon the subject" (Purdue OWL).

Passive Voice: The suspect was chased (verb) by the police (subject).

Also, the verb "be" may function as a helping verb which can separate the subject from its main verb.

Passive Voice: Carol (subject) was (helping verb) able to get (verb) her bachelor's degree.

When using the active voice, avoid "be" and try incorporating active verbs into your sentences.

Passive Voice: Carol was able to get her bachelor's degree.

Active Voice: Carol acquired her bachelor's degree.

One note to consider is



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