

the Writing Centers at Saint Mary's

Winona and Minneapolis

Grammar and Punctuation: Active vs. Passive Voice

In general, using active voice is preferred in academic writing because it is less wordy and more assertive; however, there are scenarios in which passive voice is a better option. Learn what active and passive voice are and when to use each.

Active Voice

Researchers investigated the effects of artificial sweeteners over a five-year period (Johnson & Craft, 2013).



In active voice, the subject “doing” the verb comes at the beginning of the sentence.

Passive Voice

The effects of artificial sweeteners were investigated by researchers over a five-year period (Johnson & Craft, 2013)



In passive voice, the subject “doing” the verb comes at the end of the sentence.

Active or Passive Voice?

Most of the time, use active voice because it provides more information in a more direct way, and it reduces wordiness. However, passive voice is sometimes useful:

1. Use passive voice when you want to emphasize what was done rather than who did it.

Active: People registered nearly 5 million vehicles in Minnesota in 2010.

Passive: Nearly 5 million vehicles were registered in Minnesota in 2010.

2. Use passive voice when the subject is unknown.

Passive: A crime was committed yesterday afternoon.