**Grammar: Active and Passive Voice**

**Active voice** means that a sentence has a subject that acts upon its verb.

**Passive voice** means that a subject is a recipient of a verb’s action. You may have learned that the passive voice is weak and incorrect, but it isn’t that simple. When used correctly and in moderation, the passive voice is fine.

In English grammar, verbs have five properties: voice, mood, tense, person, and number; here, we are concerned with voice. The two grammatical voices are **active and passive**.

**What’s the difference between active and passive voice?**

**Active voice**

When the subject of a sentence performs the verb’s action, we say that the sentence is in the *active voice*. Sentences in the active voice have a strong, direct, and clear tone. Here are some short and straightforward examples of active voice.

**Active voice examples**

Monkeys adore bananas.

The cashier counted the money.

The two sentences have a basic active voice construction: subject, verb, and object. The subject *monkey* performs the action described by *adore*. The subject *the cashier* performs the action described by *counted*. The subjects *take action* in their sentences.

**Passive voice**

A sentence is in the [**passive voice**](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/passive-voice/)**,** on the other hand, when the subject is acted on by the verb. The passive voice is always constructed with a conjugated form of *to be* plus the verb’s past participle. Doing this usually generates a preposition as well. That sounds much more complicated than it is—passive voice is actually quite easy to detect. For these examples of passive voice, we will transform the two active sentences above to illustrate the difference.

**Passive voice examples**

Bananas are adored by monkeys.

The money was counted by the cashier.

Let’s take a closer look at the first pair of sentences, “Monkeys adore bananas” and “Bananas are adored by monkeys.” The active sentence consists of *monkeys* (subject) + *adore* (verb) + *bananas* (object). The passive sentence consists of *bananas* (object) + *are adored* (a form of *to be* plus the past participle *adored*) + *by* (preposition) + *monkeys* (subject). Making the sentence passive flipped the structure and necessitated the preposition *by*. In fact, the two of the transformed sentences above required the addition of *by*.

## When to use active and passive voice

Using the active voice conveys a strong, clear tone and the passive voice is subtler and weaker. There are times when the passive voice is useful and called for. Take “The squirrel was chased by the dog,” for example. That sentence construction would be helpful if the squirrel was the focus of your writing and not the dog.

## How to change a sentence in passive voice to active voice?

Switching the passive voice into the active voice is straightforward, but it requires a bit of practice. In the equivalency table below, notice that the tense of the verb to be in the passive voice is always the same as the tense of the main verb in the active voice. In order to use the active voice, you will have to make the subject of the action explicit.

| **Tense** | **Active voice** | **Passive voice** | **Active sentence** | **Passive equivalent** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Simple present | keep | is kept | I keep the butter in the fridge. | The butter is kept in the fridge. |
| Present continuous | is keeping | is being kept | John is keeping my house tidy. | My house is being kept tidy. |
| Simple past | kept | was kept | Mary kept her schedule meticulously. | Mary's schedule was kept meticulously. |
| Past continuous | was keeping | was being kept | The theater was keeping a seat for you. | A seat was being kept for you. |
| Present perfect | have kept | have been kept | I have kept all your old letters. | All your old letters have been kept. |
| Past perfect | had kept | had been kept | He had kept up his training regimen for a month. | His training regimen had been kept up for a month. |
| Simple Future | will keep | will be kept | Mark will keep the ficus. | The ficus will be kept. |
| Conditional Present | would keep | would be kept | If you told me, I would keep your secret. | If you told me, your secret would be kept. |
| Conditional Past | would have kept | would have been kept | I would have kept your bicycle here if you had left it with me. | Your bicycle would have been kept here if you had left it with me. |
| Present Infinitive | to keep | to be kept | She wants to keep the book. | The book wants to be kept. |
| Perfect Infinitive | to have kept | to have been kept | Judy was happy to have kept the puppy. | The puppy was happy to have been kept. |
| Present Participle & Gerund | keeping | being kept | I have a feeling that you may be keeping a secret. | I have a feeling that a secret may be being kept. |
| Perfect Participle | having kept | having been kept | Having kept the bird in a cage for so long, Jade wasn't sure it could survive in the wild. | The bird, having been kept in a cage for so long, might not survive in the wild. |