

STYLE

TIP

Overusing the passive voice makes your writing sound weak and awkward. In general, use the active voice to help make your writing direct and forceful.

WEAK

Shingles were torn from the roof by the high winds.

FORCEFUL

The high winds **tore** shingles from the roof.

Reference Note

For more about **helping verbs**, see page 372.

Active Voice and Passive Voice

18f. A verb in the **active voice** expresses an action done by its subject. A verb in the **passive voice** expresses an action done to its subject.

Compare the following sentences:

ACTIVE VOICE The school librarian **has formed** a book club.

PASSIVE VOICE A book club **has been formed** by the school librarian.

ACTIVE VOICE A happy clown **delivered** the balloons.

PASSIVE VOICE The balloons **were delivered** by a happy clown.

ACTIVE VOICE The illustrator **had used** watercolors.

PASSIVE VOICE Watercolors **had been used** by the illustrator.

ACTIVE VOICE Someone **broke** the shop window last night.

PASSIVE VOICE The shop window **was broken** by someone last night.

Notice that the object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence. The subject of the active sentence is expressed in a prepositional phrase. This prepositional phrase can be omitted.

PASSIVE VOICE The shop window **was broken** last night.

In a passive sentence, the verb phrase always includes a form of *be* and the past participle of the main verb. Other helping verbs may also be included.

ACTIVE VOICE Mrs. Edwin **fixed** the computer.

PASSIVE VOICE The computer **was fixed** by Mrs. Edwin.

ACTIVE VOICE Lucinda **had planted** those marigolds.

PASSIVE VOICE Those marigolds **had been planted** by Lucinda.

The passive voice emphasizes the person or thing receiving the action. The passive voice is useful when you do not know who performed the action or when you do not want to reveal the performer of the action.

These flowers **were left** on the doorstep sometime this afternoon. [The performer is unknown.]

"A large donation **was given** anonymously," said Mrs. Neal. [The speaker does not want to reveal the performer of the action.]

for CHAPTER 18: USING VERBS CORRECTLY pages 520-21

Active and Passive Voice

18f. A verb in the **active voice** expresses an action done by its subject. A verb in the **passive voice** expresses action done to its subject.

EXAMPLES I. M. Pei **designed** this building. [The subject, *I. M. Pei*, performs the action.]
This building **was designed** by I. M. Pei. [The subject, *building*, receives the action.]

USAGE

EXERCISE On the line provided, write AV if the underlined verb in the sentence is in the active voice. Write PV if it is in the passive voice.

Example PV 1. Our cats, Spooky and Shine, were fed by our neighbor John.

- _____ 1. We adopted Spooky last year.
- _____ 2. As kittens, Spooky and several other cats were dumped nearby.
- _____ 3. Their owner did not want them.
- _____ 4. The owner should not have left them to fend for themselves.
- _____ 5. They mostly stayed hungry until we found them.
- _____ 6. They were sick and skinny, and they were frightened by just about anything.
- _____ 7. My mother and I spent many days making friends with them.
- _____ 8. We brought them food and talked to them quietly while they ate.
- _____ 9. We had been warned that they might be too skittish to come near us.
- _____ 10. However, they acted as if they knew we were there to help.
- _____ 11. Quite a lot of food was eaten by them.
- _____ 12. Two of the kittens, calico cats, had black, tan, and white patches.
- _____ 13. The other two were covered by thick black coats.
- _____ 14. We named one of the black ones Spooky because she ran away at the slightest movement or noise.
- _____ 15. It was a long time before we were allowed to pet her.
- _____ 16. They were all taken to a veterinarian, who gave them shots.
- _____ 17. Spooky was spayed as soon as she was old enough.
- _____ 18. Our friend Eileen helped us find homes for the other three.
- _____ 19. They were all neutered before they were a year old.
- _____ 20. By spaying and neutering the cats, we are helping to reduce the problem of unwanted pets.