Passive Voice

What is passive voice?

★ A form of the verb “to be” and a past participle, such as: is believed, was seen, will be considered, or are shown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passive voice</th>
<th>Active voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The muster roll was read by the corporal.</td>
<td>The corporal read the muster roll.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fort was built.</td>
<td>General Robert E. Lee’s engineers built the fort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain demands were made.</td>
<td>The commander made certain demands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The militia company had been formed in 1675.</td>
<td>The county formed the militia company in 1675.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why avoid passive voice?

★ Passive voice leads to wordy, weak writing.
  o Example:
  ▪ Passive voice: The shelter is owned by the town, but it is run by members of the humane society and is supported, in part, by funds raised by them. The bulk of the operating funds, however, are supplied by the town.
  ▪ Active voice: Although the town owns the shelter and pays most of the operating costs, members of the humane society run the facility and provide additional support through fundraising.
  o Which would you rather read?
★ Passive voice is often vague/unclear.
  o Example: The lieutenant admitted some mistakes were made.
  ▪ Who made the mistakes?
  o Example: Because of increased demands, taxes will be raised soon.
  ▪ Who will raise the taxes?
  ▪ What kinds of demands?
  o Example: Appropriate measures will probably be taken.
  ▪ Who will take the measures?
★ The statements come across as purposefully evasive, even if they are not.

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Is there ever a time for passive voice?

★ Yes!
  o If the actor is unknown/unimportant
  o It can add sentence variety
  o Use your judgment
★ Make an effort to write in the active voice when possible.

How to fix or avoid passive voice

★ Examples:
  o Passive: The mouse was being chased by the cat.
  o Active: The cat chased the mouse.
  o Passive: The boy was hit by the ball.
  o Active: The ball hit the boy.
  o Passive: The Civil Rights marchers were washed down the streets by fire hoses.
  o Active: Police officers in Selma, Alabama washed some Civil Rights workers down the street using fire hoses.
  o Passive: Many programs were created to put Americans back to work.
  o Active: The government created many programs to put Americans back to work.
  o Passive: The conflict was started by a disagreement between the Sultan and the Janissaries.
  o Active: A disagreement between the Sultan and the Janissaries started the conflict.
  o Passive: Alice Paul was force-fed by authorities.
  o Active: The authorities force-fed Alice Paul after she went on a hunger strike.