

UNCG



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WRITING CENTER  
3211 HHRA BUILDING

## PASSIVE AND ACTIVE VOICE

*Related Handouts:* See **TERMS TO KNOW:** Vital Sentence Elements (**subject** and **verb**), and Prepositional and Verbal Phrases (**past participles**); and **WEAK VS. STRONG VERBS**

### THE PRINCIPLE

When the **subject** of a sentence *does* something (takes some action), we say that the **verb** is in the **active voice**.

Ex: Emeril **burned** the toast. (“Emeril” is the subject; “burned” is the active verb.)

When the grammatical **subject** of the sentence has something *done to it* (when the subject remains passive), we say that the **verb** is in the **passive voice**.

Ex: The toast **was burned** by Emeril. (“The toast” is the subject; “was burned” is the passive verb.)

Here’s another way to recognize passive verbs:

When a form of the verb “to be” (*is, am, are, was, were, is being, has been, etc*) is used in conjunction with a **past participle**, the verb is said to be **passive**.  
Note the underlined passive verbs in that sentence!

While using the passive voice is not incorrect (in fact, it might be necessary or preferred in some cases), the active voice usually makes sentences more clear, concise, and lively.

### EXAMPLES

CLUMSY: After a long waiting period had been endured by the contestants, the winner was announced by the judge. (passive verbs underlined)

BETTER: After the contestants *had waited* for a long time, the judge *announced* the winner. (active verbs italicized)

WORDY: Although Emeril is generally considered to be one of the best chefs in the business, prizes are not always awarded to his pies. (passive verbs underlined)

