### Using Active and Passive

### Voice Strategically Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Verbs may be in the active or passive voice. When the verb expresses an action directed by the subject toward the object of the verb, the verb is said to be in the *active voice* (*Jamie sends messages).* Verbs in the active voice are direct and forceful; they clearly identify the doer of the action. For these reasons, writing that frequently uses the active voice is vigorous and effective. It is called the *voice of business*.

When the action in a verb is directed toward the subject, the verb is said to be in the *passive voice* (*Messages were sent by Jamie*). The passive voice is effective when the action is more important than the doer or when the doer is unknown or should not be revealed (*Sloppy errors were made in the report*). The passive voice is sometimes called the *voice of tact* because it can be used to avoid mentioning the performer of the action.

To decide whether a verb is active or passive, first identify the subject and verb in a sentence. Is the subject doing the acting or being acted upon? Another clue in identifying passive-voice verbs is that they generally include a *to be* helping verb, such as *is, are, was, were, being,* or *been.*

Passive: A new movie was released. [The subject is *movie*; the passive-voice verb

is *was released*].

Active: Pixar released a new movie. [The subject is *Pixar*; the active-voice verb is

*released*.]

Passive: A law protecting oak trees was being considered. [The sentence subject is *law*; it is not doing the acting. It is being acted upon. We don't know who is doing the acting. The passive-voice verb is *was being considered.*]

Active: Legislators were considering a law protecting oak trees.[The subject is *legislators*; it is performing the action. The active-voice verb is *were considering*.]

In the following sentences underline the sentence subjects once and verbs twice. Then in the space provided, write *Active* or *Passive* to identify the voice.

1. Employees in many companies send careless e-mails. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Employees in some companies were fired for sending careless e-mails. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Communication and computer skills are required by hiring companies. \_\_\_\_\_

4. A new program was devised for making automatic payments. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Erin immediately sent e-mail messages to all committee members. \_\_\_\_\_

Convert the following passive-voice sentences to active voice. Normally you can change a verb from passive to active voice by making the doer of the action—usually contained in a *by* phrase—the subject of the sentence. If no *by* phrase is provided, make up a logical subject. Be ready to discuss the strategy (pros and cons) of each version.

6. Funds for the new hospital were contributed by private individuals.

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7. Intranets are being used as internal networks by many savvy companies.

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8. All Vista Park apartments will be converted into condominiums within a year.

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9. The Internet activity of employees is monitored electronically by managers.

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10. Production costs must be reduced if we are to continue in business.

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Convert the following active-voice sentences to passive voice. Be ready to discuss the strategy (pros and cons) of each version.

11. The driver's negligence caused a serious accident.

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12. Board members consulted no one before making the decision to cut salaries.

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13. Managers recently drew up a new e-mail policy severely restricting Internet access.

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14. We cannot send the merchandise you ordered until you provide a street address.

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15. The management here at St. Catherine's Hospital does not accept uninsured patients for emergency care.

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**Discussion Question: Why are politicians so fond of saying, "Mistakes were made"?**

**SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS**

1. Subject: Employees; Verb: send Active voice

2. Subject: Employees; Verb: were fired Passive voice

3. Subject: skills; Verb: are required Passive voice

4. Subject: program; Verb: was devised Passive voice

5. Subject: Erin; Verb: sent Active voice

**Students are to convert the following passive-voice sentences to active-voice.**

6. Passive: Funds for the new hospital were contributed by private individuals.

Active: Private individuals contributed funds for the new hospital. [The active voice emphasizes *individuals*. The passive voice emphasizes *funds.*]

7. Passive: Intranets are being used as internal networks by many savvy companies.

Active: Many savvy companies use intranets as an internal network. [The active voice emphasizes *companies.* The passive voice emphasizes *intranets*.]

8. Passive: All Vista Park apartments will be converted into condominiums within a year.

Active: Vista Park owners will convert all apartments into condominiums within a year. [This sentence required the addition of a subject, thus placing emphasis on *owners* rather than on apartments and their conversion. Writers must decide what they want to emphasize.]

9. Passive: The Internet activity of employees is monitored electronically by managers.

Active: Managers electronically monitor the Internet activity of employees. [The passive voice emphasizes the action rather than the doers. To totally conceal the doers, the sentence could have been written without the *by* phrase.]

10. Passive: Production costs must be reduced if we are to continue in business.

Active: We must reduce production costs if we are to continue in business. [The passive voice emphasizes *production costs*. The active voice emphasizes *we,* the doers of the action. Sometimes the writer wants to put more emphasis on the action than the doer.

**Students are to convert the following active-voice sentences to passive voice.**

11. Active: The driver's negligence caused a serious accident.

Passive: Negligence caused a serious accident. [The passive voice emphasizes the action and avoids mentioning the doer. Writers can control how much they reveal by their word choice.]

12. Active: Board members consulted no one before deciding to reduce salaries.

Passive: No one was consulted before the decision to reduce salaries was made. [The passive voice avoids revealing who did what. This strategy depends on the goal of the writer.]

13. Active: Managers recently drew up a new e-mail policy severely restricting Internet access.

Passive: A new e-mail policy severely restricting Internet access was recently drawn up.

[The passive voice emphasizes the action or event rather than the doer.]

14. Active: We cannot send the merchandise you ordered until you provide a street address.

Passive: The merchandise you ordered cannot be sent until you provide a street address. [The passive-voice avoids emphasis on the doer. This sentence might be revised to make it more positive: Your merchandise will be sent as soon as you provide a street address.]

15. Active: The management here at St. Catherine's Hospital does not accept uninsured patients for emergency care.

Passive: Uninsured patients are not accepted for emergency care at St. Catherine's Hospital.