**Mohawk College Logo**

**Writing Centre**

**Active & Passive Voice**

Use either the active or the passive voice based on the content and context of your message.

In active constructions, the **grammatical subject** acts through the verb:

The **snake** swallowed the mouse.

In passive constructions, the grammatical subject is acted upon:

The **mouse** was swallowed by the snake.

Writers can often look for forms of the verb “to be” (be, am, is, are, were, being, been) to distinguish between active and passive constructions.

**Advantages of Active Voice**

1. **Clarity** (Active constructions clarify the actor in a sentence.)  
   PASSIVE: A goal was scored.

ACTIVE: Jamie scored a goal.

**2. Concision** (Active constructions use fewer words.)

PASSIVE: The rope was shortened by Tim.  
ACTIVE: Tim shortened the rope.

**3. Strength** (Active constructions employ the full force of the verb.)

PASSIVE: Amy flexed her muscles.  
ACTIVE: The muscles were flexed by Amy.

**Advantages of Passive Voice**

1. **Tact** (Passive constructions obscure blame.)

ACTIVE: Kim lost the file.  
PASSIVE: The file was lost.

**2. Objectivity** (Passive constructions create the appearance of objectivity.)

ACTIVE: Dr. Colburn associates certain eating habits with bad health.  
PASSIVE: Certain eating habits are associated with bad health.

**References:**

“Active and Passive Voice” *Purdue online writing lab*. (2011, July 13). Retrieved from

[Online Writing Lab](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/01/)

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