

Active vs Passive Voice

The Craft of Writing · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

Active / passive Like you, a number of students remain confused about active voice and passive voice. Here's a re-statement about active and passive voice. First of all "active" doesn't mean "forceful/positive" and passive doesn't mean "weak/negative". Some students have written that "John said the movie would be a flop" is passive voice, and "John said the movie would be a big success" is active voice. NO! Nothing like the reality. First of all "voice" is not about speaking with one's vocal chords. Voice relates to verbs. Verbs are the "doing" words like spoke, ran, worried, punching, said, won, yelled, reading, think. Every verb has a subject. That is, the verb acts upon the subject, or the verb is acted upon by the subject. For example...John sees the book. The subject (John) performs the action, the doing. Therefore John sees the book is active voice, because in active voice the subject is the do-er of the verb. The book was seen by John is passive voice, because the subject (now the book) receives the action, that is, the seeing was received by the book, rather than John doing the seeing. Look, I know it's not easy to understand this, but all students MUST get it clear in their minds, and must concentrate on writing in the active voice, not the passive voice.

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