

Passive Voice

Voice is the form a verb takes to indicate whether the subject of the verb performs or receives the action. There are two types of voice: active voice and passive voice. **Active voice** indicates that the subject of the verb is acting on the verb. With **passive** verbs, the subject is not who or what performed the action of the verb, as in active sentences. The performer of the action is not the focus.

Form of the Passive

The passive verb always includes a form of be plus the participle of the verb. In general, only verbs which have **a direct object (transitive verbs)** occur in the passive.

active: Anastasia writes an essay each week. **passive:** Each week, an essay is written by Anastasia

**Verbs like: *be, agree, die, seem, happen, appear* do not have passive forms.

However, some verbs can be either transitive or intransitive with a slight change in meaning.

Intransitive (active): My sister has changed a lot since she started college.

Transitive: (passive): My position on this issue has been changed.

(active): My professor's paper has changed my position on this issue.

Note: The passive can be used with modal auxiliaries too.

Active: Minh might write a letter

Passive: A letter might be written.

Use the passive only when the doer of the action is not known, not important or is obvious. The focus is on the action or the receiver of the action, not the doer.

Passive: Dr. Tran was evaluated.[by the administration] **Active:** The administration evaluated Dr. Tran.

The doer of the action is called the **agent** and is expressed in a prepositional phrase with **by**. Because the focus is often on the receiver of the action, the agent is often not stated.

The exam was given online.

ACTIVITY: PRACTICE ACTIVE AND PASSIVE

Rewrite the following. Change from active to passive. If the agent is unimportant, leave it out.

Example: (Active) The tutor helps the student. (Passive) The student is helped by the tutor.

1. The teacher explains the passive very well.

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2. My professor returned my paper yesterday.

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3. The student government will pass the new budget soon.

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4. They are building a new science complex at the university.

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5. At UC Davis, they have given students many writing classes to choose from.

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6. My teachers had recommended me before UC Davis accepted me.

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7. He gave a long speech about diversity at freshman orientation.

8. Thanh will invite Anna to the party.

9. They painted the fraternity house dark gray.

10. Written exams stress me out.

ACTIVITY: EDIT A STUDENT PARAGRAPH FOR PASSIVE AND ACTIVE

Check all verbs for correct use of passive or active voice.

This article focuses on how students can get along with professors properly. First, professors must be respected by students and should be called by the appropriate title. In a class where professors respect students, the rules of the syllabus are followed and students ask questions. Academic integrity is valued, and plagiarism must be avoided. Students must also be honest and tell professors the truth. A simple truth is always better than a well-prepared lie. Working hard in college classes is encouraged, as well as talking with professors during their office hours.

6.16 Prepositions

Prepositions give us more information about location or direction most of the time and usually are found at the start of a prepositional phrase. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and ends with a noun.

The students **from my psychology class** met **at the CoHo for a study group**.

The ESL writing courses **at UC Davis** require students to submit portfolios **at the end of the quarter**.
The following words are the most commonly used prepositions:¹

about	from	in front of	around	without
below	onto	outside	concerning	before
excepting	underneath	up	instead of	despite
off	after	along	regarding	during
toward	between	inside	with	near
above	in	over	at	throughout
beneath	out	upon	despite	with regard to
for	until	among	into	behind
on	against	by	within	except
under	beyond	in spite of	down	of
across	from	past	like	to
beside(s)	onto	up to	through	with respect to

But be careful, a word that looks like a preposition but is actually part of a verb is called a **particle**.

Our study group **met up** at the library.

Up is usually a preposition, but here, it's part of the verb 'met'.

She went **up** the stairs.

¹ <https://webapps.towson.edu/ows/prepositions.htm>

To avoid confusing prepositions with particles, test by moving the word (up) and words following it to the front of the sentence:

If the resulting sentence does not make sense, then the word belongs with the verb and is a particle, not a preposition. Note the difference:

a. **Up** at the library our study group met.

b. **Up** the stairs she went.

The second sentence makes sense, so *up* is a preposition.

Some other examples of particles:

give in	turn in	pull through	wore out	broke up
go in for	put in for	bring up	found out	blow up
look up	make up	look over	check out	clock in

ACTIVITY: ON YOUR OWN

Choose three prepositions and write a sentence using each. Then, choose 2 particles and write sentences using those verb phrases.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____