Preferring Active Voice

The **active voice** names an "actor" who is the subject of the sentence. The actor performs the verb. Generally, the active voice is the good writers "voice of choice." It facilitates clarity and helps achieve conciseness.

*Who is doing the verb?* If the answer is clear, the sentence is active.

***Examples:***

* The students tested the samples.
  + *Who is testing?* The students.
* The samples failed.
  + *What is failing?* The samples.

In active voice sentences, the subject ***does*** the action.

***Example:*** Liz played the piano.

In passive voice sentences, the subject ***receives*** the action.

***Example:*** The piano was played by Liz.

* The sentence that uses the active voice is stronger, uses fewer words, and clearly shows who performs the action.
* The sentence that uses the passive voice is weaker and less direct.

Sometimes the doer of the action is omitted in passive voice sentences, making the sentence weak and sometimes unclear.

**When Passive Voice is Preferred**

Even with its drawbacks, passive voice is sometimes the preferred voice. Following are examples of when to use passive voice:

1. When you want to hide the identity of the actor:

*The body was removed from the scene.*

1. When it produces greater emphasis on the main point of the sentence:

Active: *The legislature should not crucify the poor on the cross of a balanced budget.*

Passive (and better)*: The poor should not be crucified on the cross of a balanced budget*

Source: http://www.kentlaw.edu/academics/lrw/grinker/LwtaPassive\_Voice.htm

Also, many scientific articles are written in the passive voice because it is considered to be more objective and impersonal. A classic exception to this is Watson and Crick's classic paper on DNA, which began with a sentence in the active voice:

*We wish to suggest a structure for the salt of deoxyribose nucleic acid (D.N.A.).*

Just imagine this in the passive voice!