

We write in active voice. Passive voice has been read.

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Active voice and passive voice are used every day and can make the difference between dull writing and engaging content. Yet, most people have no idea what active voice is. It's not their fault; English classes skip over this brief but vital topic. So much so that this topic often eludes professional writers.

The mystery is over!

Active voice is when an **actor** does a **verb** to the **noun**. "I write copy."

Passive voice is when a **noun** is acted upon by an **actor**.
"The copy was written by me."

Passive voice takes the attention away from the actor to emphasize the noun instead.

I've heard a novelist refer to passive voice as Past Dense. Passive voice turns an otherwise present tense sentence into past tense. It also adds unnecessary words like "was" and "by." It just feels slower.

Still not getting it? Try these examples:

- We discussed customer success stories over coffee. We had been discussing customer success stories over coffee.
- I sent them the finished case study. The finished case study was sent.
- Are we meeting with John today? Will we be visited by John Today?
- We need to integrate that new CRM. That new CRM needs to be integrated.

Spot passive voice by looking for "to be."

Passive voice is not always so blatant. But you can usually correct it by removing any conjugated forms of "to be." The eight conjugated forms are: "be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been."

You'll notice in the examples above that all the main verbs become secondary verbs because "to be" takes over. "Discussed" becomes "been discussing."

Turn passive into active by removing "to be" and focusing on the main verb.

Active voice instantly improves your writing, whether you're drafting a quick email or a lengthy proposal. However, you'll start noticing Passive voice everywhere— especially in business materials.

Communication Conundrum

Normally, this is where I talk about a ridiculous marketing mishap. Communication conundrum is in the same vain. I'm too fired up about passive voice.

Before becoming a business writer, I worked as the only marketing person for an Audio-Visual Integrator. The proposal writer, a kind mentor, taught me about proposal writing since I was going to work with him.

He shared some examples of real proposals others wrote. A glaring and consistent issue was the rampant passive voice. Some of these proposals

held great promise, but you needed to reread dense, clunky sentences to understand their meaning.

The person reading your proposal, the decision-maker, will not reread your poor writing.

They are reviewing countless proposals. They are looking for every reason to cross yours off the list. Unless they are specifically interested in you, they will not remember every statistic or feature you offer.

They will remember how your proposal made them feel. If your drab, dense, passive-voice-riddled proposal puts them to sleep, they will move on. Bad writing does damage.

It's not just what you say; it's how you say it.

Active voice alone will not make or break a deal. But it will get your message further.

Useless information

Murder of Crows? A gaggle of geese? A school of fish? These are collective nouns, most of which come from The Book of St Alban's (1486). This ancient book was one of the first mass-produced by the printing press. It was a compilation of essays on "gentlemen's interests."

It was a magazine for men, discussing hawking, hunting, and heraldry. Appended to the hunting essay were the made-up company terms for animals. These collective nouns are arbitrary. They stayed in our vocabulary because of the book's proximity to the printing press and, thus, the increase in English literacy.

Sincerely,
Austin

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Notice in your Bottom Line."*

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