

Harry Potter

And Peeves the Passive Voice Poltergeist!

Q. What is Passive Voice?

A. Passive voice is the term used to describe sentences in which the subject does NOT carry out the action of the verb. Instead the subject is acted upon, therefore it is Passive.

Example: Underlined Word/s = Subject

Passive Voice - The water balloon was thrown by Peeves.

Active Voice - Peeves threw the water balloon.

- The subject in the first sentence is water balloon, but it does not do the throwing; it just sits there and allows Peeves to throw it. It does not put up a fight or get in the act; it's Passive.
- The subject in the second sentence is Peeves, and he lobbs that balloon. He is definitely Active!

Q. The sentence written in Passive voice looks grammatically correct. Is Passive Voice an incorrect way to speak and write?

A. Here's the mischievous thing about Passive Voice sentences; they are NOT wrong! But, like Peeves the pesky Poltergeist, they can cause messy mayhem. Passive Voice sentences haunt the writer with two distinct problems:

1. Due to the Passive (pushover) subject, many sentences written in Passive Voice lack excitement. They sound boring and dull. They scare any sense of high action, adventure, suspense, or fun out of writing.

Example:

Passive Voice - The Firebolt was shot out of the air by Peeves, and the limp form plummeting to earth was Harry.

Active Voice -

2. Passive Voice is often used to redirect emphasis or blame from someone who has done something naughty, or someone who does not want attention directed at them. They don't want to be the subject of scrutiny. Thus, Passive Voice has gained the reputation of being the language of weak, sneaky, or untrustworthy people; politicians use Passive voice quite often.

Example:

Passive Voice - "The criminal records of the poltergeist have been mishandled or lost..." stated Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic. (The speaker does not admit to the fact that they were the one who lost the records. In fact no one is named as the culprit.)

Active Voice -

PRACTICE PULVERIZING PASSIVE VOICE

Directions:

Decide whether or not the sentence is in Passive Voice, and rewrite those that are in Active Voice. Simple rephrasing fixes most Passive Voice issues. Here are a few hints for easy rephrasing.

- Change the person or thing in the sentence that is "acting out" the verb, to the subject of the sentence.
- If the sentence does not tell you who/what the "actor" is, then use the context of the writing to help you figure it out.

1. The great dragons were seen by Harry alone.

2. The fact that evil Lord Voldemort had returned was completely denied by the Ministry of Magic and Cornelius Fudge.

3. "Years ago, illegal activities were performed by one of the members of Hogwarts staff..." admitted a sweating Severus Snape to special correspondent Rita Skeeter.

