

## Active and Passive Voice Exercises:

### General Guidelines:

*Both active and passive voices are used in academic writing; the key is to choose the right voice for the right purpose. Although grammar checkers may caution against using passive voice, it is commonly used in academic writing (Swales 119).*

*Many writers use the passive too often, but it has important uses. Use it in these contexts:*

- *You don't know who did an action, readers don't care, or you don't want them to know.*
- *You want to shift a long and complex bundle of information to the end of a sentence, especially when doing so also lets you begin with a chunk of information that is shorter, more familiar, and therefore easier to understand.*
- *You want to focus your readers' attention on one or another character. (Williams and Bizup 56)*

### Exercise 1) Change the following sentences from active to passive:

a) The company markets the new device as a product that can improve both mental and physical performance.

b) You can see the results in Table 1.

c) We call a book containing lists of word definitions a dictionary.

d) You should always keep valuable records in a safe.

e) We designed each of these nets to collect approximately 40 gallons of water each day.

f) Manufacturers inject the virus samples of each selected strain into separate batches of fertilized eggs to amplify the amount of virus.

g) The manufacturers grow each virus strain separately inside the eggs over the course of several days, after which they harvest, inactivate, and purify them.

Exercise 2) To practice using the two voices of the verb, convert the following sentences from active to passive or from passive to active. Make any other changes necessary. **Which version of each sentence seems more effective, and why?**

*Example:*

The aspiring actor was discovered in a nightclub.

A **talent scout discovered** the aspiring actor in a nightclub.

a) When the Eiffel Tower was built in 1889, it was thought by the French to be ugly.

b) At that time many people still resisted industrial technology.

c) The tower's naked steel construction epitomized this technology.

d) Beautiful ornament was expected to grace fine buildings.

e) Further, the tower could not even be called a building because it had no solid walls.

Exercise 3: In the following, change all active verbs into passives, and all passives into actives. Which sentences improve? Which do not? (In the first two, active verbs that could be passive are italicized; verbs already passive are boldfaced.)

a) Independence is **gained** by those on welfare when skills are **learned** that the marketplace *values*.

b) Different planes of the painting are **noticed**, because their colors are **set** against a background of shades of gray that are **laid** on in layers that cannot be **seen** unless the surface is **examined** closely.

c) In this article, it is argued that the Vietnam War was fought to extend influence in Southeast Asia and was not ended until it was made clear that the United States could not defeat North Vietnam unless atomic weapons were used.

d) Science education will not be improved in this nation to a level sufficient to ensure that American industry will be supplied with skilled workers and researchers until more money is provided to primary and secondary schools.