

What is Passive Voice in Academic Writing?

Worksheet

Passive voice is formed by 'be' + past participle (e.g. 'The data was analyzed by the researchers'). In academia, it creates distance between the writer and the subject, lending authority and objectivity to the claim.

Questions

1. Passive form of 'The psychologist observed the behavior':
 - A) The behavior was observed by the psychologist
 - B) The behavior was observed
 - C) Observing was done by the psychologist
 - D) The psychologist was observed
2. Why prefer passive voice in research papers?
 - A) it's shorter
 - B) it emphasizes researcher over finding
 - C) it sounds objective and impersonal
 - D) it is always required
3. Complete the passive sentence: The hypothesis ...
 - A) was tested by the scientists
 - B) tested by scientists
 - C) was being tested
 - D) scientists tested it
4. Which is the most academically formal?
 - A) We discovered a new compound.
 - B) The team discovered a new compound.
 - C) A new compound was discovered.
 - D) A new compound is discovered by us.
5. Active: We conducted a survey of 500 participants.
6. Active: The team discovered three new species.
7. Academic abstract: Make this passive. 'Researchers examined how stress affects memory.'
8. Define: Why use passive voice in academic writing?
9. Define: Passive voice structure?
10. Define: When to omit 'by agent' in passive?

Answer Key

1. B) The behavior was observed — Most formal version omits 'by the psychologist' unless agent is essential. If retained, answer 0 is acceptable.
2. C) it sounds objective and impersonal — Passive voice depersonalizes the writing, shifting focus to the discovery/result.
3. A) was tested by the scientists — Passive: be (was) + past participle (tested).
4. C) A new compound was discovered. — Passive (no agent) is most formal and objective for academic writing.
5. Passive form shifts focus to survey, not the researchers. Identify: agent (We) → object (survey)
Result: A survey of 500 participants was conducted. More formal: A survey of 500 participants was conducted across urban regions.
6. In formal research, we depersonalize the discovery. Passive: Three new species were discovered. Or with agent (if important): Three new species were discovered by the expedition team. Usually omit 'by the team' in academic reports.
7. Shift focus to what was examined (the relationship). Passive: How stress affects memory was examined. Or (more natural): The effects of stress on memory were examined. Or (most formal): The relationship between stress and memory was investigated.
8. To create objectivity, shift focus from researcher to subject/finding, and emphasize the result over the doer.
9. be + past participle. Example: The experiment was conducted (present passive: is conducted, past: was conducted).
10. When the agent is unknown, unimportant, or general (e.g. 'the team'). Academic writing often omits it for formality.

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