

Passive into Active

In a sentence written in the active voice, the subject of sentence performs the action. In a sentence written in the passive voice, the subject receives the action.

Example 1:

- **Passive:** It is believed by the candidate that a ceiling must be placed on the budget by Congress.
- **Active:** The candidate believes that Congress must place a ceiling on the budget.

Example 2:

- **Passive:** The interviews were conducted by two people who had no relationship with New York City.
- **Active:** Two people who had no relationship with New York City conducted the interviews.

A trick to remember: If you can add “by zombies” after the verb and it makes sense, you probably have passive voice. If it does not make sense, it is active voice, and you have successfully escaped the zombies.

Example 3:

- The town was attacked (by zombies). **PASSIVE**
- Zombies attacked the town (by zombies). **ACTIVE**

Note: In most cases, using active voice will result in shorter, sharper sentences that are easier for the reader to follow. This makes your writing clearer and aids the reader in visualizing what is happening.

Sentence Structure

Using different types of sentences will help emphasize different words or ideas. Here are four types of sentences:

A simple sentence includes only one independent clause

- Ex.: I kicked the ball.

A compound sentence contains at least two independent clauses. Either a semicolon or a coordinating conjunction joins these clauses.

- Ex. I kicked the ball, and it hit Tom.

A complex sentence has one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

- Ex. Since Tom cried, I can no longer kick the ball.

A compound-complex is a sentence having two or more coordinate independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

- Ex. I kicked the ball, and because of that Tom cried and my parents were angry.

Tips and Tricks

Here are some tips for success:

- Read your work from the last sentence to the first sentence- ALOUD.
- Underline your subjects and circle your verbs.
- Keep graded papers or a journal of your instructor’s comments. Make notes about the areas you need to practice.
- Have someone read your paper aloud or record yourself reading your paper and play it back. Pay close attention.
- Make a Post-draft outline. It will help you see how well paragraphs connect to each other, whether or not sections of your paper are redundant, and if you have supported your thesis in each paragraph.
- Use words that you know. Do not use words that you cannot define. It may not be the correct word choice or meaning for the sentence.
- Use control find (Ctrl + F) to search for words.
- Save proofreading until the end!

Resources

Resources for students:

- The Writing Center tutors and handouts
- Grammarly (Grammarly is a website/application that automatically detects grammar, spelling, punctuation, word choice, and style mistakes in your writing; it also has grammar lessons)
- The Purdue OWL (The Online-Writing Lab (OWL) has writing resources and instructional material).
- Scribens (Corrects over 250 types of common grammar and spelling mistakes, including verbs, nouns, pronouns, prepositions, homonyms, punctuation, typography, and more.)

Need more help with Academic English?

If you need help with Academic English, consider making an appointment or walking in to meet with Amanda, the Academic English Language Specialist. Her email address is atomanek@csusm.edu

csusm.edu/writingcenter

ACADEMIC ENGLISH

Academic English is different from everyday spoken English because much of academic English is about expressing the relationship between ideas. Academic English can be challenging for ELL students; however, learning specific techniques used by scholars will help students produce a concise and coherent academic paper.

Important Principles

Grammatical Correctness: The audience must understand what the speaker or author is trying to say or must be influenced in the way the speaker or writer is trying to influence them. Grammar errors can confuse the reader or sometimes change the meaning of the passage.

Specific language: Assume that your reader does not know much about the topic of your paper. Be specific and include information that will help your reader understand.

Formalism: We interact with a variety of people every day, often times using language such as “Hey, what’s up?” In an academic paper, it is essential to stay away from conversational language (see inside for specific examples).

Academic Audience: An academic audience is a group of experts in their field who are able to comprehend higher-level papers. Keep the audience in mind while forming and supporting your argument.

Clichés: Avoid clichés. Do not use phrases or words that are overused. Be unique and straightforward.

Consistent: Consistency is presenting ideas in the same or an expected order. Don’t change the order of words or ideas suddenly and be sure to keep consistent verb tense.

Citing or writing questions?

THE WRITING CENTER

ELB 273

csusm.edu/writingcenter

Research process questions?

THE LIBRARY

KEL 3rd Floor

biblio.csusm.edu

Avoid 1st Person

First person point of view is considered informal and is not encouraged in academic writing. First person can appear to weaken the credibility of the writer in research and argument because it reads as the writer's personal opinion. First person personal pronouns include *I, we, me, us, my, mine, our,* and *ours*.

- Example (1st person): I will be discussing why bullying is a problem and how we can change it.
- Example (3rd person): Bullying is a problem among middle school students; however, community interactions and programs can eliminate bullying.

The reader knows that you are the person discussing the issue, so you can introduce your ideas in third person. --The exception to this is if your professor has asked you to write about personal experience. Then, it may be acceptable to use first person.

Avoid 2nd Person

Academic papers should avoid using second person. Second person refers to the pronoun *you*. While this rule is becoming more relaxed, the general rule is that formal papers should not address the reader directly. Here are some tips to avoid using 2nd person:

- Use the word *people*
 - Ex. Most people believe that the sun is hot.
- Use the word *one*
 - Ex. One may have a different opinion about the topic
- Use *someone* or *somebody*
 - Ex. Someone might have thought it was a good idea to go to the beach on a Sunday.
- Rearrange the sentence to avoid the word *you*.

Vagueness- NO!

Do not assume that your audience knows the topic of your paper. If you use vague language, your reader might not understand your argument due to a lack of background information. Be specific and descriptive!

Example:

- *Vague:* The class was boring, and I did not learn anything about the topic.
Vs.
- *Specific:* In history class, the professor made students read two chapters of dense material, which made the information boring and incomprehensible.

No Expletives

Expletives are words or phrases that do not add any structural or grammatical meaning to a sentence. These words and phrases are referred to as “empty” or “fillers.”

Different types of expletives:

- Empty words: actually, really, basically, truly, obviously, etc.
- Vague words: Things, stuff, something, etc.
- Meaningless phrases: in my opinion, kind of, sort of, it is important that
- Redundant pairs: Final outcome, past history, free gift, each individual, true facts
- Question-less question words: What or how; unnecessary if you are not asking a question.
- “This” as the subject of the sentence or without a noun directly after it.

The above words are seen as informal and can be taken out of a sentence without changing the overall meaning.

No Contractions

Contractions are shortened versions of words that use apostrophes in place of letters, such as "can't," "isn't," "she's," and "wouldn't." The more formal, non-contracted versions are "cannot," "is not," "she is," and "would not." A sentence will sound better non-contracted.

Examples:

- The man in the store wouldn't pay full price for a damaged item.
- Vs.
- The man in the store would not pay full price for a damaged item.

The second sentence sounds professional and scholarly.

No Colloquialisms or Clichés

Colloquialisms are slang or localized language, and clichés are sayings that have been overused and lost their meaning overtime. Both should be avoided in an academic paper.

- Common colloquial expressions: wanna, gonna
- Common clichés: actions speak louder than words, in this day and age, in modern society

To avoid clichés, try to be concise in what you want to say. More info on and examples of clichés can be found here: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/cliches/>

[csusm.edu/writingcenter](https://writingcenter.csusm.edu)

Outside Sources

Academic English often relies on outside sources to support arguments in the writing. While personal examples may have been enough before, academic writing often requires that the writer brings in information from experts who have published research on the topic.

To use outside sources, you have the option to quote, paraphrase, or summarize the information.

- Remember that whenever you use an idea from an outside source, you need to cite that information.
- Paraphrasing is the most common way to cite in academic English. Be sure your paraphrase is in your words, and be careful if you use words that you have found in a thesaurus.
- Different classes or professors may prefer certain citation styles. Be sure to ask your professor if you are unsure of which style to use.

Keep Consistent Tone

Using new vocabulary found in a thesaurus might seem like a good way to make your writing “sound more academic.” However, adding in words that do not match your tone or voice will make your writing sound awkward.

If parts of the paper “sound” like you but other parts “sound” more academic, your professor may believe you have plagiarized or cited incorrectly. To avoid this:

- Write in your own words first. If the tone seems too informal, try using words from your textbook or class lecture before a thesaurus.
- If you use words from a thesaurus, ask someone else to read your paper. Ask them if the tone seems consistent and share where it does not.
- Consider using a corpus, such as Wordandphrase.info, to see examples of how new vocabulary should be used in full sentences.

Writing Workshops

Each semester, there are workshops held during U-Hour and occasionally at other times. These workshops sometimes include topics related to Academic English.

To learn more or see the schedule, visit the Writing Center or the Writing Center website.