



*"Mistakes were made... Fortunately the passive voice came to our rescue."*

## Why do we care?

Students may be critiqued for using the passive voice when they mean the active voice and vice versa. Certain voices in sentences are more appropriate in specific fields than others, so pay attention to what discipline you're writing in first.

Information retrieved from:  
Toadvine, April, Allen Brizee, and Elizabeth Angell.  
"Active and Passive Voice." *Purdue Online Writing Lab*, 13 July 2011,  
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/01/>

## Writing Desk Hours

**Monday-Thursday**

12-5pm, 7-10pm

**Friday** 12pm-5pm

**Sunday** 1-5pm, 7-10pm

Rolvaag 302 & 354

The answers to these practice examples are located at the Rolvaag Writing Desk!

Have more questions? Still don't understand active/passive voice?

Make an appointment with a writing tutor!

- 1.) Visit the Writing Desk homepage, or [stolaf.edu/asc/writing-help/](http://stolaf.edu/asc/writing-help/)
- 2.) Click on the Appointments box
- 3.) Sign in with your St. Olaf email, then click an appointment that works with your schedule!

Or just drop on by!

Pamphlet created by Naomi Chalk '18

## Active vs. Passive Voice

*Brought to you by the Writing Desk*

# Writing desk

<http://wp.stolaf.edu/asc/writing-help>



Active voice is used in most non-scientific writing and can often make your writing clearer for your readers, by identifying the source or cause of an action. It can also help clarify wordy or complicated sentences.

Passive voice is frequently used in scientific writing, or when the cause of some phenomenon is unknown.



# ASC

Academic Support Center

In a sentence using **active voice**, the **subject** of the sentence **performs the action** expressed in the verb.

*Example: Over half of my Organic Chemistry class failed the midterm.*

In this sentence, the subject (half of my Organic Chemistry class) is **acting on** (failing) something else (the midterm).

*Passive voice receives the action.  
Active voice gives the action.*

Verbs using the **passive voice** show something else acting on the subject.

*Example: The midterm was failed by over half of my Organic Chemistry class.*

In this sentence, the **subject** of the sentence ("midterm") is **receiving the action** ("failed by").

Passive voice can be useful when it is unknown whom or what is completing the action.

*Example: The plasma was not sampled thoroughly.*

In this case, we aren't sure who is completing the action (sampling).

Try changing this sentence so it uses the active voice:

*Next time, the material will be studied harder by students.*

Next, try changing this sentence from active to passive voice:

*Organic Chemistry students sampled plasma in lab today.*

Now try making your own sentences using these rules!