

Active and Passive Voice

Teaching

The **voice** of an action verb indicates whether the subject performs or receives the action.

When the subject of a verb performs the action, the verb is in the **active voice**.

Traditional poetry **uses** rhyme. (The subject, *poetry*, performs the action.)

When the subject of a verb receives the action, the verb is in the **passive voice**.

Rhyme **is used** in traditional poetry. (The subject, *rhyme*, receives the action.)

The passive form is often used when the person or thing performing the action is indefinite or unknown. It is formed by using an appropriate form of *be* with the past participle of the main verb.

Identifying Active and Passive Voice

The main verb in each sentence is in boldfaced type. If the performer of the action named by that verb is identified, underline that word or phrase. On the line to the right, write **A** if the verb is in active voice or **P** if it is in passive voice.

Sample This poem **was written** by Gerard Manley Hopkins. P

1. Gerard Manley Hopkins **was born** in England in 1844. _____
2. His poems, such as "The Windhover" and "Pied Beauty," **influenced** 20th-century English poets. _____
3. He **entered** the Jesuit order of Roman Catholicism in his early twenties. _____
4. The poems he had already written **were destroyed**. _____
5. After learning and studying Welsh, he **was inspired** to write poetry again. _____
6. Hopkins **wrote** many of his poems about the natural world. _____
7. His poems **were structured** in a manner quite unlike other poetry of his time. _____
8. His metric technique **is called** "sprung rhythm" because it has an abrupt rhythm rather than a smooth one. _____
9. He **used** internal rhyme and alliteration to portray the uniqueness of natural objects. _____
10. Hopkins **moved** to Ireland where he became a professor at University College. _____
11. He **wrote** a series of poems that are called the "terrible sonnets." _____
12. He **was torn** between the world of senses and his religious vocation. _____
13. For the most part, his poems **were published** posthumously. _____
14. The first edition of his work **was published** in 1918, almost 30 years after his death. _____

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Lesson
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More Practice

A. Identifying Active and Passive Voice Verbs

Underline the main verb in each sentence. On the line to the right, label the verb **A** for active voice or **P** for passive voice.

1. Vanessa writes a poetry column for a literary magazine. _____
2. Her columns have been printed regularly for the last three years. _____
3. Young poets have been interviewed for the columns. _____
4. The column has featured her delightful sense of humor. _____
5. Besides poems from new writers, she especially likes Hispanic poetry. _____
6. Her audience is alerted to programs featuring poets as speakers. _____

B. Identifying and Changing the Voice of Verbs

If a sentence is in the active voice, rewrite the sentence, changing the verb to passive voice. If a sentence is in the passive voice, decide whether the passive construction is better than the active would be. If it is better in passive, write **Correct as is** on the blank line. If it is not, rewrite the sentence in the active voice.

EXAMPLE Cotton Mather praised Anne Bradstreet's poetry.

Anne Bradstreet's poetry was praised by Cotton Mather.

1. The American poet Anne Bradstreet published only one book in her lifetime.

2. In fact, the manuscript was taken without her knowledge by her brother-in-law.

3. He took the manuscript from Massachusetts to a publisher in London.

4. Bradstreet was born in England, probably in 1612.

5. Eight children were raised by her in the newly founded Massachusetts colony.

6. Her feelings about her Massachusetts house burning down are described in one of her well-known poems.

7. Another famous poem expresses her great love for her husband.

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Application

A. Revising to Avoid Passive Voice

Revise this paragraph, changing verbs from passive to active voice where appropriate.

William Cullen Bryant was born in 1794 in Cummington, Massachusetts. "Thanatopsis," his most famous poem, was written when he was 16 years old. His first volume, *Poems*, was published when he was only 27 years old. The poem "To a Waterfowl," was included in this volume. His poems were written about nature, like the poems of the English poet William Wordsworth. The Berkshire Hills in western Massachusetts were beautifully described by him in several of his poems. The abolition of slavery had been supported by him well before the outbreak of the Civil War.

B. Using Active and Passive Voice

Choose a work of poetry that you are familiar with and enjoy. It may be a lyric poem, a humorous poem, an excerpt from a play written in poetry (such as a speech from one of Shakespeare's works), or any other form of poem, rhymed or not. Write a brief essay explaining why you enjoy the poem. In your essay, use active voice and passive voice verbs in roughly equal numbers.
