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Using the Passive Voice in Scientific Writing

Developed by Dr. Charlene Sorenson, Gallaudet University Department of Chemistry and Dr. Tonya Johnson, Gallaudet University English Department.

When to use passive voice?

1. Science fields: chemistry, biology, physics, math, computer science.
2. Medical fields: patient records, medical journals.
3. Legal fields: client records, proceedings, notes.

Why use passive voice?

1. Let the facts stand on their own!
2. Removes some accusations of bias (who did it, how many did it.)
3. Presents an "air" or feeling of logic.

Unscientific

I did this experiment several times. Each time I got the same results. After the last time, I was convinced that I was right. The new bacteria must have caused all the problems we found in our patients.

Scientific

The procedure was repeated until there was certainty regarding the results. The problems encountered by the patients were caused by the bacteria.

Rule Summary Chart for Changing Sentences from Active to Passive

Rule	Example
1. Start with active-voice sentence.	Prof. Sorenson ate the apple.
2. Remove the subject from the sentence.	_____ ate the apple.
3. Move the object to the subject "slot"	The apple ate.
4. Add "to be" before the verb in the same tense as the original verb.	The apple was ate.
5. Change the original verb to its past participiple* form.	The apple was eaten.