



**Passive voice and vague subjects/objects:** In academic writing, you will probably encounter complex sentences where the subject or object is not immediately obvious. This might include the pronoun "It." Remember to identify the action and ask yourself who or what is performing that action.



It has long been argued that too much screen time is bad for children.  
*Object*                      *Passive verb*                      *Phrase represented by "it"*

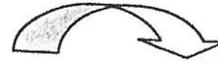
ACTIVE VOICE THAT LOOKS LIKE PASSIVE VOICE

**Note:** Do not assume sentences are using passive voice just because they have a similar verb pattern of [a form of the verb "to be"] + [verb ending in "-ing"].

Remember, the main thing that separates passive from active voice is whether the subject is doing the action or receiving the action.



The committee was considering the proposal.  
*Subject*                      *Active verb*  
*doing the*  
*action*



The car is baking under the sun.  
*Subject*                      *Active verb*  
*doing the*  
*action*

WHICH ONE IS BETTER?

That depends on the situation. What you've probably learned is that **academic papers** should avoid passive writing completely. This is because active voice makes your writing sound more direct, so when you're writing research papers that support an argumentative thesis statement, you want your sentences to have more force.

But **scientific papers** usually require passive voice. This is because passive voice takes the agent (in this case, the person who did the experiment) out of the writing. So your lab report should focus less on you, the scientist, and more on 1) presenting the results of the experiment or study and 2) making it easy for readers to follow your process and repeat the experiment themselves to see if they can replicate your results. That's how the scientific community tends to communicate its information.

Passive voice also has a place in **creative writing**. Sometimes an author may want to hide which character performed a certain action, or show that the character is distancing him/herself from that action. The author may also decide that passive voice is better for the tone or mood of the story, or that passive sentence structure just sounds better in the rhythm of the story.