Passive voice: the one-page cheat sheet

passivevoicechecker.com · free checker, converter and the Passive Voice Index

1. The shape of a passive

a form of BE (or GET) + a past participle [+ by + the doer]

be forms: am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being · get forms: get, gets, got, gotten, getting

The report was written by the manager. ▫ *The manager wrote the report.*

2. The zombie test

Add "by zombies" after the verb. If the sentence still makes sense, it is passive.

"The invoice was paid by zombies" works ▫ *passive. "She was running by zombies" does not* ▫ *active.*

3. Looks passive, but it is an adjective (do not "fix" these)

I am interested. She was tired. They were excited. He is married. I was born in 1960.

Test: can you put "very" in front? "very tired" works, "very written" does not.

4. Passive in all twelve tenses (verb: write)

Simple present:	*is written*	Present progressive:	*is being written*
Present perfect:	*has been written*	Simple past:	*was written*
Past progressive:	*was being written*	Past perfect:	*had been written*
Simple future:	*will be written*	Future perfect:	*will have been written*
Modal:	*must / can / should be written*	Infinitive:	*to be written*
Gerund:	*being written*	Get-passive:	*got written*

5. Four ways to fix one

a. Name the doer and move it first: The claim was denied. ▫ The adjuster denied the claim.
b. Swap the verb: A decision was made. ▫ We decided.
c. Drop the dummy opener: It was determined that… ▫ We found that…
d. If nobody did it, say so plainly: Mistakes were made. ▫ I made mistakes.

6. When passive is the right call

The doer is unknown (My car was stolen), obvious (He was arrested), or irrelevant (The samples were stored at -80 °C); you want the receiver as the topic (The bridge was built in 1932); you are being tactful (Your request was not approved).

7. How much is too much?

Yoast flags more than 10% passive sentences. Our Passive Voice Index: fiction ~13%, State of the Union ~12%, inaugural addresses ~23%, founding documents ~21%. Aim under 10% for web copy; academic and legal prose runs higher.