

Here's another example:

The treaty was signed last night.

Who signed the treaty? Whom do we blame if the treaty fails? We don't know, do we? Passive voice avoids responsibility. It is a primary tool of those who want to obfuscate or of those who lack confidence and decisiveness. Why not give the true picture and write:

Last night, the President of the U.S. and the President of Mexico signed a mutual defense treaty.

Here's a practice activity for you.

The huge red building was entered at the sound of the bell. Instructions were yelled at us by a mean-looking, old lady. A crowd of six-year-olds was followed down a long hallway, up some steps, and down another corridor by me clutching my lunchbox. Mrs. Nearing's room was looked for. Our destination was reached when we were loudly greeted by a tall, black-haired woman. A tag was pressed to my chest after my name was asked and a tag was printed by her. Several big, six-year-olds could be seen inside the room by me. The door was closed with a loud bang. The glass near the top of the door was kept from shattering by a network of wires. The wires were observed to be prison-like. So, back in school was I.



You should have noticed that every sentence is written in the passive voice. Awkward and tedious, isn't it? Now, it's your turn. Rewrite this passage by simply changing all of the passive constructions into active voice.


Compare Your Revision with Ours

At the sound of the bell, I entered the huge, red building with hundreds of other kids. Just inside the entrance, a mean-looking old lady yelled instructions at us. I clutched my lunchbox and followed a crowd of other six-year-olds down a long hallway, up some steps, and down another corridor as we looked for Mrs. Nearing's room. I knew we had reached our destination when a tall, black-haired woman loudly greeted us. She asked me my name, then she printed it on a sticky tag and pressed it to my chest. Once inside the room, I could see several other kids my age, some of them BIG. Finally, Mrs. Nearing closed the door with a loud bang. A network of wires kept the glass near the top of the door from shattering. These wires looked like the bars of a prison to me. I was back in school.



Tip: Have you noticed that many sentences written in passive voice contain the prepositional phrase beginning with *by*? That *by*-phrase immediately following the verb (usually compound) can be a clue that you have passive voice at work in the sentence. **GET RID OF IT**, if you can.

Note: There are times when you deliberately want to use passive voice, but it should be a very conscious choice on your part. Here are four questions to ask yourself.

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- Do you want to avoid stating who/what is responsible for an action?
 - Is there a specific goal or effect that you wish to emphasize?
 - Do you want to create a “special effect”?
 - Do you want to sound “academic” and avoid using the dreaded “first person” responsibility?

If you can answer a loud “yes” to any or all of these questions, then you may decide to employ passive voice.

Let’s hear your voice—loud and clear! Take responsibility for what you think, say, and write. This is your voice. It is the real you. Give it life. Don’t suffocate it.

Pacing



Pacing is the “movement” of a literary piece from one point to another. The primary component of pacing is syntax: sentence length, sentence type, and punctuation. There are several ways to add variety and pacing to your writing:

- a mixture of sentence types, known as sentence variety
- the rhetorical question
- the imperative sentence
- the exclamatory sentence
- varying the beginnings of sentences

For example, if you were to compose a brief paragraph about writing an AP English Language and Composition essay, you could write:

I like to write essays for AP Comp class. I like to think through an idea, and I like to try out different approaches to discussing an idea. My AP teacher gives us lots of time to prepare our essays. He gives us a topic. Then, he has us do an outline and then a first draft. We have our first draft read by a member of our peer group. I do my revision after this. I also read my essay aloud to someone. Then, I’m ready to hand it in to my instructor for grading.

Not that all the sentences begin with subject and verb. All the sentences, except for the second one, are simple. The second is no more than a compound sentence made up of two very simple main clauses. Do you feel the tediousness and immaturity of this paragraph? There is *nothing* grammatically wrong with any of the sentences. However, would you be happy with this paragraph if you had written it? Something is missing, and that something has to do with *pacing*.

✓ Rewrite this paragraph so that there is a variety of sentences and sentence beginnings. How does your revision compare with ours?

Because I like to think through ideas and try different approaches to presenting an idea, I really enjoy my AP Comp class. Another reason for my enjoying writing essays is my AP teacher's approach to composition. For him and, therefore, for us, writing is not a quick, hit-or-miss assignment. After we choose a topic, Mr. Damon allows plenty of time for preparation, which includes outlining, writing the first draft, and reading by our peer groups. It is only after completing these steps that I revise and write the final draft I will submit for grading. It's a good plan.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT COHERENCE

Coherence is accepting your responsibility as a writer to “deliver the goods.” Your reader has expectations you are obliged to meet.

- Basically, the reader looks for some kind of announcement as to what is to follow (the thesis, assertion, claim).
- Near the end of the introduction, the reader expects to find some hints about the major points that you will discuss in your piece of writing.
- The body of the presentation will develop the discussion of each major point.
- The reader will expect to be led logically from one major point to another via “connective tissue.”
- The reader expects some sort of final comment or remark, not a summary. Among the many possibilities, this final “point” could be
 - an interpretation of the significance of the points of your discussion
 - a prediction
 - an anecdote
 - a question
 - a quote

Make certain that your ending/conclusion is related to your discussion. Don't introduce new or irrelevant ideas or comments. Also, make sure that the final comment is consistent in tone and attitude with the rest of the paper.

Just as the reader has particular expectations of you as a writer, YOU have expectations when you read the writing of others and when you complete a rhetorical analysis of another's written work. Ask the very same questions that are asked of you.