Active vs. Passive Voice?

**Voice refers to the “who” or “what” that is doing the verb’s action in a sentence**

**Active voice = emphasises the person (subject) who performs an action**

**Passive voice = emphasises the recipient of the action or sometimes the action itself**

Sentences can either be written in the “passive voice” or the “active voice”. Writers need to be intentional about voice in order to ensure clarity. Using active voice often improves clarity, while passive voice can help avoid unnecessary repetition.

**Examples:**

**Active voice:**

**“The boy plays the piano.”**

The boy is the ACTIVE subject, so this sentence is in the active voice

**Passive:**

**“The piano is played by the girl.”**

In this sentence the piano is the subject receiving the action so this is the PASSIVE voice. The piano is not actively doing the playing so is a passive subject.

Microsoft Word often highlights passive sentences as being incorrect. In academic writing this can usually be ignored as the passive voice is often acceptable.

Which voice should you write in?

Writers are often advised to avoid the passive voice, but it not a grammatical error. In academic writing, this type of sentence structure is sometimes useful or necessary. However, overusing it can make your writing unclear or convoluted.

Active voice is used for most non-scientific writing. Using active voice for the majority of your sentences makes your meaning clear for readers and keeps sentences from becoming too complicated or wordy. Even in scientific writing, too much use of the passive voice can cloud the meaning of your sentences.