

Guideline 4: Use the active voice

The active voice shows who is responsible for doing what, which tends to eliminate confusion.

Passive voice: The bill was sent to you on Sept. 1.

Active voice: *We* sent you the bill on Sept. 1.

How do I do this?

- Use personal pronouns, such as “I” or “we,” or name the person doing the action.
- Place the subject (the “doer”) at the beginning of the sentence.
- Look for “deadly 7” verbs: **am, is, are, was, were, be, and been**. This signals you might be using passive voice in your sentences and may need to rework your sentences to be more direct.

For example:

“It was decided...” is a passive statement.

“We decided...” is an active statement.

Why do this?

- Your readers will know who is doing what, which will help them quickly grasp your message.
- Your sentences will tend to be more clear and concise.
- Research shows that customers translate passive sentences into active sentences in their heads anyway.

Do	Don't
The Director wrote the memo yesterday. Subject - Action Verb	The memo was written yesterday. Passive Voice
Brad threw the ball.	The ball was thrown by Brad.
We require you to show identification.	Identification is required.

More Examples

- **Before:** The applicant must give an explanation for his or her delay.
- **After:** You must explain the delay.