

Active voice

Use the active voice wherever possible. An active voice sentence uses the simple grammatical structure of subject-verb-object.

The sentence “the man hit the table” is in the active voice, where the table is the object of the verb “hit”. The sentence “the table was hit by the man” is in the passive voice. As you can see, the first sentence is not only shorter, but it is far simpler and easier to understand. This is especially important when your reader or listener speaks English as a second or third language.

The following examples will demonstrate this rule:

RIGHT:

Copra growers have demanded a new subsidy scheme.

WRONG:

A new copra subsidy scheme has been demanded by growers.

RIGHT:

Angry villagers attacked three Japanese tourists in Western Province yesterday.

WRONG:

Three Japanese tourists were attacked by angry villagers in Western Province yesterday.

The main exception to this rule is when the object of the sentence is much more newsworthy than the subject. For example:

RIGHT:

The Prime Minister was attacked by angry villagers in Western Province yesterday.

WRONG:

Angry villagers attacked the Prime Minister in Western Province yesterday.