



# The 'passive voice'

The **passive voice** is an important and useful structure in academic writing.

To construct it, you need two components:

**the verb to be:**  
(is, are, was, were, will, been, being) + **the past participle form of the main verb**

- The financial collapse **was caused** by various factors.

- Members **are provided** with digital devices ...

- Modifications will **be made** to the design.

**verb to be** + **past participle** (main verb - cause / provide / make)

The **passive voice** is useful as it enables you to avoid mentioning *who* or *what* performs the action. Look at these two sentences:

(A) Revolutionaries started the revolution.

(B) A revolution **was started**.

In sentence (B) **the passive voice** is used. We don't need to know who carried out the action (it's obvious); *the focus is on **the revolution***.

In academic writing you are often advised to avoid using or over-using personal pronouns, like "I" or "we". **The passive voice** allows you to do this. Look at these two sentences:

(A) I identified some interesting correlations.

(B) Some interesting correlations **were identified**.

In sentence (B) the student has used **the passive voice**, *which has enabled them to avoid using "I"*.

Thus, **the passive voice** is useful when **describing a method or a process**:

- Two plants **were placed** in a semi-shaded spot.
- 10mg of the compound **was added** to Plant A.
- Readings **were taken** at 48 hour intervals.

**The passive voice** is useful in **introductions and conclusions**:

**(Introduction)**

In the first section, key terms will **be defined** .... This will **be followed** by a summary of the case study ... An analysis of the impact will **be given** ... Finally, conclusions will **be drawn**.

**(Conclusion)**

To sum up, the reasons for and against have **been discussed**... Some insight into the current landscape **was given** ...