Be your own editor: Getting active

Use the **active voice** of verbs, not the passive. Not all verbs have both active and passive voices. Those that do, express the effect of one person or thing upon another.

**Active:** The reporter interviewed the principal. (5 words)
Chess Club elected officers. (4 words)

**Passive:** The principal was interviewed by the reporter. (7 words)
Officers were elected by Chess Club. (6 words)

The active voice uses fewer words, while the passive voice takes longer to say the same thing and lacks a sense of action. Some writing coaches advise students to eliminate the passive voice entirely. Others admit its value when the subject or actor is unimportant or unknown.

**Note:** Don’t confuse the passive voice with linking and helping verbs in other verb phrases.

**Active:** The reporter finished his story early.

**Passive:** The story was finished early by the reporter.

**Linking:** The reporter was Jerri Smith.

**Active:** Jerri was looking for our advisor. (Was = helping verb)

**Part A**

Rewrite the following sentences to eliminate the passive voice. Some contain more than one passive verb phrase; others require a subject for the verb when changed into active voice. After each sentence, note the word count before and after.

1. Many questions are being asked by students about the new athletic code.

   ____________________________________________________________

   **Word count:** Before ______ After ______

2. Practice Quiz Bowl sessions are being offered to prospective members by Mr. Dale Swiggart, Team advisor.

   ____________________________________________________________

   **Word count:** Before ______ After ______

3. The Bulldogs’ first football game of the season was played in a day when a record high was reached by the temperature.

   ____________________________________________________________

   **Word count:** Before ______ After ______

4. Twelve students – five male and seven females – will be offered parts in “Too Late or Too Little,” this spring’s drama presentation.

   ____________________________________________________________

   **Word count:** Before ______ After ______

5. Such extracurricular activities as athletics and music will be eliminated or cut by the Byrnehurst Board of Education if the upcoming school levy is not passed by voters.

   ____________________________________________________________

   **Word count:** Before ______ After ______
Part B

Another way to eliminate the passive voice is to rewrite the sentence, using a different approach and verb.

**Passive:**
A poll was taken recently by the staff of The Bulldog Times in which a decline was shown in the number of male student smokers. (22 words)

**Improved:**
A recent Bulldog Times poll shows a decline in the number of male student smokers (14 words)

-or-
The number of male student smokers has declined, according to a recent Bulldog Times poll. (14 words)

Rewrite the following sentences to eliminate the passive voice. You may use the active voice of the verb given or rewrite the sentences with a different verb and approach. You may want to divide some sentences into several clearer, shorter ones.

1. The complaints that have been made by students about the school cafeteria food are being taken into serious consideration while the new menu is being planned by a committee, headed by the cafeteria manager.

2. Simulated air raid drills were held in Mr. Dale Dart’s American history classes to show how students were made to take part in air raid drills during the Cold War with Russia so they would be prepared if enemy attacks were made on the U.S. mainland.

3. Socializing between classes must be targeted before efforts to control tardiness to class can be successful, states Mrs. Pamela Early, dean of students.

4. Elimination of senior courtyard privileges is being discussed by the administration because of accusations that the rights have been abused and complaints have been received about noise from teachers in nearby classrooms and discarded trash from school custodians.

5. Juanita Sanchez, senior, has been selected to represent the school in a citywide seminar which will be Tuesday March 5, when coordinating activities for the Summer Peace and Fun program will be discussed.