

## SHIFTS BETWEEN ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

**Active Voice:** If the grammatical subject of the sentence performs the action indicated by the verb, the sentence is active.

*Ignatius sells hotdogs.*

What is the grammatical subject? Ignatius.

What is the action in the sentence? Selling hot dogs.

Does Ignatius do the selling? Yes, therefore the sentence is active.

**Passive Voice:** If the grammatical subject of the sentence does not perform the action but is the recipient of the action, the sentence is passive. Sometimes, the person performing the action is added in a prepositional phrase (*by Ignatius*), but this phrase can be dropped without making the sentence ungrammatical.

*The hotdogs are sold (by Ignatius).*

What is the grammatical subject? The hot dogs.

What is the action in the sentence? Selling.

Does the hot dogs do the selling? No, therefore, the sentence is passive.

**If a writer shifts between active and passive voice in the same sentence or in two sentences immediately following each other, the reader is bound to be confused. When revising these shifts, it's best to go with active voice throughout – although it is okay to use the passive voice if you do not know how performed the action or if it does not matter (*The rally was held before the game.*) or if the action is more important than the person who did it (*The experiment was performed successfully.*)**

⊕ *Ignatius considered his mother crazy, which was not appreciated by her.*

⊙ *Ignatius considered his mother crazy, which she did not appreciate.*

⊕ *When he is depressed, Ignatius reads “The Consolation of Philosophy.” Each main point is then listed on a large pad of paper, and the pad is thrown on Ignatius’s bedroom floor.*

⊙ *When he is depressed, Ignatius reads “The Consolation of Philosophy.” He lists each main point on a large pad of paper and throws the pad on the floor of his room.*

⊕ *Myrna Minkoff listens to all of Ignatius’s problems, and her psychoanalytical replies are written back to him quickly.*

⊙ *Myrna Minkoff listens to all of Ignatius’s problems and writes her psychoanalytical replies back to him quickly.*

► Did you like the sample sentences? Get the whole story in John Kennedy O’Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces!*