**Active vs. Passive Voice**

**Post-Class Activities**

These post-class activities have been designed to give you further practice in spotting sentences written in the active and passive voices, writing in the different styles of voice, and choosing the style appropriately depending on the content of your writing.

**Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 (1 mark each, 4 marks total)**

Answer the following questions that focus on the differences between the active and passive voices, and on the philosophy of using each style.

**Question 1 (1 mark)**

Which of the scenarios below is a more suitable candidate to be written in the passive voice?

**Scenario A:** You are writing about the art of Leonardo Da Vinci after visiting a gallery showcasing his work.

**Scenario B:** You are writing about some graffiti you discovered on your locker but do not know who drew it.

**Question 2 (1 mark)**

Justify (in a few words) why you choose either Scenario A or Scenario B as the more suitable candidate in Question 1 (above).

**Question 3 (1 mark)**

Complete the following sentence:

Generally speaking, using the active voice in scientific writing will result in:

**A:** More concise sentences with less specific detail in them

**B:** More concise sentences with at least as much specific detail in them

**C:** Less concise sentences with at least as much specific detail in them

**D:** Less concise sentences with less specific detail in them

**Question 4 (1 mark)**

Study the following sentence:

“**Ben was encouraged by his friends to run for science president, but he decided not to make an official application.**”

This sentence features:

**A:** The active voice only

**B:** The passive voice only

**C:** The active voice first and the passive voice second

**D:** The passive voice first and the active voice second

**Question 5 (4 marks)**

Read the four sentences written in the active voice below. For each blank space, match the appropriate reason that explains why it would be wise to write the same/similar information in the passive voice. The reasons are below the sentences on this page.

Michael made the critical mistake of forgetting to add warm water to the tank after 30 minutes had passed. **This sentence would be better if written in the passive voice, because it [?????].**

The overall trend in the data clearly shows that activity rate increases when temperature also increases. **This sentence would be better if written in the passive voice, because it [?????].**

Some specialist group, individual, or university team should clean the laboratory. **This sentence would be better if written in the passive voice, because it [?????].**

Somebody with access to the laboratory stole my cell cultures yesterday evening. **This sentence would be better if written in the passive voice, because it [?????].**

Match the following reasons to the sentences by copying and pasting them into the correct blank space in the answer box:

**Reason 1:** includes unnecessary detail to confuse the main purpose of the sentence.

**Reason 2:** needlesslyhighlights an unknown ‘doer’ of the action.

**Reason 3:** makes a subjective statement sound objective.

**Reason 4:** makes the statement unnecessarily personal.

The above question was designed to highlight that there are occasions when using the passive voice is not only acceptable but actually preferable to the active voice. Whenever you communicate anything in science (and in any format), your number one goal should be to make sure it is easy to understand. For this reason, writing concise sentences is a very important skill to master. Having said this, you can very occasionally integrate active and passive voice sentences into the same paragraphs (and even sentences) in the right circumstances.

**Questions 6, 7, 8 and 9 (2 marks each, 8 marks total)**

Re-read the four active voice sentences in Question 5. Now re-write each one in the passive voice but try hard to use fewer or the same number of words as in the original sentences without losing **important/necessary detail.** This will give you practice in writing concisely even when you have to use the passive voice.

For each answer, simply include your re-written statement and the word count.

**Question 6 (2 marks)**

**Sentence 1:** “Michael made the critical mistake of forgetting to add warm water to the tank after 30 minutes had passed.”

**Question 7 (2 marks)**

**Sentence 2:** “The overall trend clearly shows that activity rate increases when temperature also increases.”

**Question 8 (2 marks)**

**Sentence 3:** “Some specialist group, individual, or university team should clean the laboratory.”

**Question 9 (2 marks)**

**Sentence 4:** “Somebody with access to the laboratory stole my cell cultures yesterday evening.”

**Questions 10, 11, 12 and 13 (1 mark each, 4 marks total)**

Read the short paragraph below about the effect of randomness in dictating how many individuals of each species are found in a given environment at any time. For questions 10, 11, 12 and 13, you need to consider each sentence separately and say whether the active and/or passive voices are used (and in which order).

For example, for each question you must say whether the sentence features:

**Option A:** The passive voice only

**Option B:** The active voice only

**Option C:** The passive voice first and the active voice second

**Option D:** The active voice first and the passive voice second

*“In any given environment, the number of individuals present that belong to different species will be dictated by a combination of abiotic and biotic factors. For example, predators reduce the numbers of herbivores, whereas favourable environmental conditions cause populations to grow. However, scientists fail to predict exact numbers; this is because random events that cannot be predicted by anyone also impact populations. Any random event can cause the numbers of one species to increase, while another species can be negatively impacted by the same unpredictable event.”*

**Question 10 (1 mark)**

**Sentence 1:** *In any given environment, the number of individuals present that belong to different species will be dictated by a combination of abiotic and biotic factors.*

**Question 11 (1 mark)**

**Sentence 2:** *For example, predators reduce the numbers of herbivores, whereas favourable environmental conditions cause populations to grow.*

**Question 12 (1 mark)**

**Sentence 3:** *However, scientists fail to predict exact numbers; this is because random events that cannot be predicted by anyone also impact populations.*

**Question 13 (1 mark)**

**Sentence 4:** *Any random event can cause the numbers of one species to increase, while another species can be negatively impacted by the same unpredictable event.”*

**Question 14 (5 marks)**

Choose a topic in science that you are very interested in and write a paragraph abut it, incorporating **five or six** sentences. Note that you do not need to write a long answer (100-150 words will be fine). Make sure you write sentences in **both** the active and passive voice, but make sure you choose the style of voice to be appropriate for each sentence.

This activity is designed to give you practice in moving interchangeably between the active and passive voice in sentences in the same paragraph, and to make you think more about the circumstances in which it isappropriate to use each style.