

Help With: Passive Voice for Koreans



Despite what some people believe, using passive voice isn't wrong or ungrammatical. It can be useful in such subjects as scientific writing: *10 ml is added to the solution*. Yet passive voice usually uses more words while adding nothing, and this is one reason why its use should be minimized:

- Passive: The moon was landed on by Neil Armstrong. (Eight words)
- Active: Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. (Six words)

One problem the passive voice creates is the **missing subject**. Too much writing in the passive creates the sense that information has been left out.

- Windows were broken. (Who or what broke them?) The storm broke windows.
- It is believed that men and women communicate differently. (Who believes this?)
- Deborah Tannen believes that men and women communicate differently.

Using the active voice helps your readers understand facts and arguments more clearly.

Passive Voice & Word Order

Korean word order is agglutinative whereas English is analytical. This means that English makes sense by word order (the *dog* bit the *man*) and in Korean particle endings tell us who does what. Korean would say “geh-ga saram-ul murl-utda” – dog-*subject* man-*object* bite-*past tense*. The word order is subject-object-verb.

When using passive voice, if you aren't careful the reader doesn't know who does what. The subject and object are not in their normal English order of SVO:

Dog is **bite** the *man*.

If you want to write an active sentence, the simplest is a subject-verb-object sentence:

Article + subject noun + verb + (preposition) + article + object noun.

The student goes to the cafeteria.

Passive sentences have some form of *is* (is, are, were, be) and an *-ed/-en* verb to tell the reader that it is passive (object-verb-subject, OVS)

The donuts *were eaten* by the class.

The money *was guarded* by the policemen.

30ml of water *is added* to the solution.

Practice. Make passive sentences with these nouns, two at a time.

Medicine	Money	e-mail	Telephone	Soccer game
Class	Students	Argument	Beer	Ceremony
Fire	Accident	Car	Boy	Thunderstorm
Resume	Pollution	Purse	President	Sugar
G-20 summit	Fish	Trees	Homework	Building