Reading Centre
making a difference
Writing tips for Years 7 to 10
Voice
Choosing the right language

Writers make decisions about what language to use based on:
• the context of the language use
• the relationship between themselves and their audience
• the mode of using the language (mostly spoken or written).

*Voice* is a language tool that can influence the reader by drawing attention to particular information included in a sentence and in what order.

In this way, writers choose to highlight or hide ‘who’ or ‘what’ is responsible for an action.
Subject of a sentence

The most basic kind of sentence is called simple. A simple sentence has a **subject** and a **verb** (doing, thinking, saying, being or having word).

For example:

*The dog barked.*

The subject is the **dog** and the verb is **barked**.
Subject and object

Sometimes a simple sentence can have both a subject and an object.

The object is the person or thing that is having the action done to it.

For example:

*The dog barked at the cat.*

The subject is the dog and the object is the cat.

The cat is having the action done to it. It is being barked at.
Grammatical voice

Voice expresses the relationship of the subject to the verb. Voice is about the order of information in a sentence.

There are three types of voice in a sentence.

1. **Active** voice places the subject first in the sentence before the verb.
2. **Passive** voice places the receiver of the action before the verb in the sentence.
3. **Agentless** passive voice is when the subject is removed from the sentence altogether.
Active voice

For example:

*The dog caught the ball.*

The **subject** of the sentence is the dog and it comes before the verb ‘caught’. It is the one doing the action.

The ball is the **object** of the sentence. It is the thing that has the action done to it. It comes after the verb.

When the subject of the sentence comes first before the verb, the voice is **active**. The focus is on the subject.
Passive voice

For example:

*The ball was caught by the dog.*

The subject of the sentence (the dog) is now at the end of the sentence and comes after the verb. The object comes first.

This is called **passive** voice. The focus is not on the subject, but on the object.
Agentless passive voice

For example:

*The ball was caught.*

The subject of the sentence (the dog) has been taken out of the sentence leaving only the object (the ball).

This means that there is no subject in the sentence. This is referred to as **agentless passive** voice.
Why is grammatical voice so important?

Writers make purposeful choices about grammatical voice to suit their purpose and audience.

If writers wish to emphasise the actions of a person or thing, they will use active voice.

If writers want to minimise the actions of a person or thing, they will use passive voice.

If writers want to completely hide the actions of a person or thing, they will use agentless passive voice.
Examples

Active voice:
1. *Scientists have made a ground-breaking discovery.*
A writer would use active voice to highlight the actions of the scientists.

Passive voice:
2. *A ground-breaking discovery was made by scientists.*
A writer would use passive voice to focus a reader more on the discovery than the scientists.

Agentless passive voice:
3. *A ground-breaking discovery was made.*
A writer would use agentless passive voice to focus a reader only on the ground-breaking discovery.
Summary

Writers consider purpose and audience when deciding what information to include in each sentence and in what order.

Next time you are writing, think about what you would like the reader to pay most attention to and what is less important.

Consider using the tool of voice to order information in a way that suits the purpose and audience of your writing.