Active Verbs

When writing academic papers, you should use active verbs instead of passive verbs. Here are the various active verb tenses:

**Simple Present:**
A present or active condition
Ex.: Grandma Sally loves cats.

**Present Progressive:**
An activity in progress
Ex.: Arielle is walking to school.

**Future:**
An activity or event that will (or will not) exist or happen in the future
Ex.: I am going to the opera on Friday.

**Present Perfect:**
Expresses habitual or continued action
Ex.: Kim has loved Star Trek longer than most people.

**Present Perfect Progressive:**
Expresses the duration of an action that began in the past, has continued into the present, and may continue into the future
Ex.: Nancy has been working on his test for two hours, and he still has an hour left.

**Future Perfect:**
Expresses an action that will be completed by or before a specified time in the future
Ex.: The new library will be completed in January.

Passive Verbs

Passive verbs should be avoided in academic papers. Here are the various passive verb tenses:

**Simple Past:**
A completed action
Ex.: The team of explorers adventured through the jungle.

**Past Progressive:**
A past action that took place over a period of time
Ex.: Stephen was searching for his lost library book.

**Past Perfect:**
Describes a past event or condition completed before another event in the past
Ex.: Corrine had already seen the musical.

What to look for in your paper:

- Any use of “was”
- Any use of “have” or “had”
- Verbs ending in “-ed”

Quick Tips:
In the Sciences, passive voice is typically used when discussing already published works.

Scan the code above for additional practice
Using Active Verb Tenses

Active vs. Passive

**A paragraph using passive voice:**
(NOT PREFERED)

It was not until “Chapter XII” that Hemingway presented an ideal matador without focusing primarily on what masculinity is not. Monos, picador horses, and cuadrilla did not appear in this vignette; Villalta faces the bull without human assistance. He carries only a “muleta,” the infamous “…red cloth attached to a stick,” and a sword (“Muleta, n.”). Stripped of outside assistance, Villalta is able to focus on the primary relationship of the sport: him, as the matador, and the bull. Because there are no distractions, Villalta’s form is masculine and powerful. The narrator describes that “when the bull charged he swung back firmly like an oak when the wind hits it, his legs tight together, the muleta trailing and the sword following the curve behind” (105). Comparing Villalta to “an oak” not only establishes his firmness, but also suggests the inherent nature of his skill. His movements do not seem calculated; they are instinctual. Relying on his instinct, Villalta is able to defeat the bull because “just for a moment they became one” (105). The bull, with his sheer force, is a model of masculinity; in killing the bull, Villalta seems to absorb the essence of masculinity from to bull to reach the ideal. But doing so clearly requires significant focus. Villalta cannot be drawn into the crowd – he must separate himself. Despite “the crowd roaring,” Villalta is able to maintain the separation until he kills the bull (105). After he succeeds, he raises “his hand up at the crowd” (105). This subtle gesture to the crowd is far different from the interaction between the other matadors and the crowd, which is why Villalta emerges as the ideal. Extending his hand to the crowd simultaneously acknowledges and distances them. If his palm faces out, the gesture delicately reminds the crowd to stay back. Therefore, ideal masculinity is accomplished by separating and distinguishing oneself from the conventional.

**A paragraph using active voice:**
(PREFERRED)

It is not until “Chapter XII” that Hemingway presents an ideal matador without focusing primarily on what masculinity is not. Monos, picador horses, and cuadrilla do not appear in this vignette; Villalta faces the bull without human assistance. He carries only a “muleta,” the infamous “…red cloth attached to a stick,” and a sword (“Muleta, n.”). Stripped of outside assistance, Villalta is able to focus on the primary relationship of the sport: him, as the matador, and the bull. Because there are no distractions, Villalta’s form is masculine and powerful. The narrator describes that “when the bull charged he swung back firmly like an oak when the wind hits it, his legs tight together, the muleta trailing and the sword following the curve behind” (105). Comparing Villalta to “an oak” not only establishes his firmness, but also suggests the inherent nature of his skill. His movements do not seem calculated; they are instinctual. Relying on his instinct, Villalta is able to defeat the bull because “just for a moment they became one” (105). The bull, with his sheer force, is a model of masculinity; in killing the bull, Villalta seems to absorb the essence of masculinity from to bull to reach the ideal. But doing so clearly requires significant focus. Villalta cannot be drawn into the crowd – he must separate himself. Despite “the crowd roaring,” Villalta is able to maintain the separation until he kills the bull (105). After he succeeds, he raises “his hand up at the crowd” (105). This subtle gesture to the crowd is far different from the interaction between the other matadors and the crowd, which is why Villalta emerges as the ideal. Extending his hand to the crowd simultaneously acknowledges and distances them. If his palm faces out, the gesture delicately reminds the crowd to stay back. Therefore, ideal masculinity is accomplished by separating and distinguishing oneself from the conventional.

**NOTE:** Using active verbs allows the paragraph to sound much more academic. The most common tense is *simple present*, which is the easiest to use.