

LNC Writing Center

Scientific Voice

Use Passive Voice to Avoid Personal Pronouns

Why? Scientific writing often de-emphasizes the individuals behind the science because it highlights the objectivity of that scientific work. Science's goal is to be objective, and passive voice helps show that. Make sure to avoid any language that identifies you as an individual, not just the pronouns themselves.

How? Avoid these pronouns: *I, you, me, he, she, we, him, her, us, them*

- On most word processing documents, you can click Control+F or use the “Find” function to search for these words one by one.

Active voice reveals and emphasizes the actor: *I drove the car*

Passive voice hides or de-emphasizes the actor: *The car was driven* or *The car was driven by me*

- ✗ *We* performed the experiment and experienced **disappointing results**.

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- ✗ *We* performed the experiment and found that the **results did not support our initial hypothesis**.

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- ✓ The experiment **was performed**, and the **results did not support the initial hypothesis**.

Avoid Being Too Certain or Too Hesitant

Be aware of what you can and cannot know for certain and reflect that in your word choices.

- Words like *may, might, appear, suggests* and phrases like *it would seem* or *it is possible* show that you are not 100% certain.
- Words like *always, never*, or referring to *all* of something will communicate that you are 100% certain.

Avoid Informal Vocabulary

- Avoid using informal adverbs (*really, clearly, so much*).
- Avoid qualifiers (*a little, definitely*).
- Avoid using emotional or exaggerated words (*amazing, obvious, terrible*).
- Use formal synonyms for informal words
 - *deals with* → *addresses*
 - *about/around* → *approximately*
 - *big* → *large* or *considerable*
 - *nowadays* → *currently*
 - *done* → *performed* or *conducted*
 - *like* → *such as*
 - *seen/saw* → *observed*
 - *take place* → *occur*
 - *get* → *obtain* or *acquire*
 - *often* → *frequently*
 - *sometimes* → *occasionally*
 - *more and more* → *increasingly*

Practice

Are these sentences objective or subjective? Explain your reasoning.

1. Although the shark population has dwindled over time, evidence suggests that their numbers will increase within the next few years.
2. The newest installment in this historic franchise puts all the previous movies to shame.

Rewrite these sentences from active to passive voice while also making vocabulary changes for formality and accuracy.

1. We did not attempt to reach out to non-responders because we thought they were unimportant to the analysis.
2. We agreed that the experiment should be done within a couple hours.
3. I put on the first coat of primer paint right after the acid rinse.
4. Our results prove that all high school students enjoy repeating bass lines in songs.
5. These findings are truly confounding.