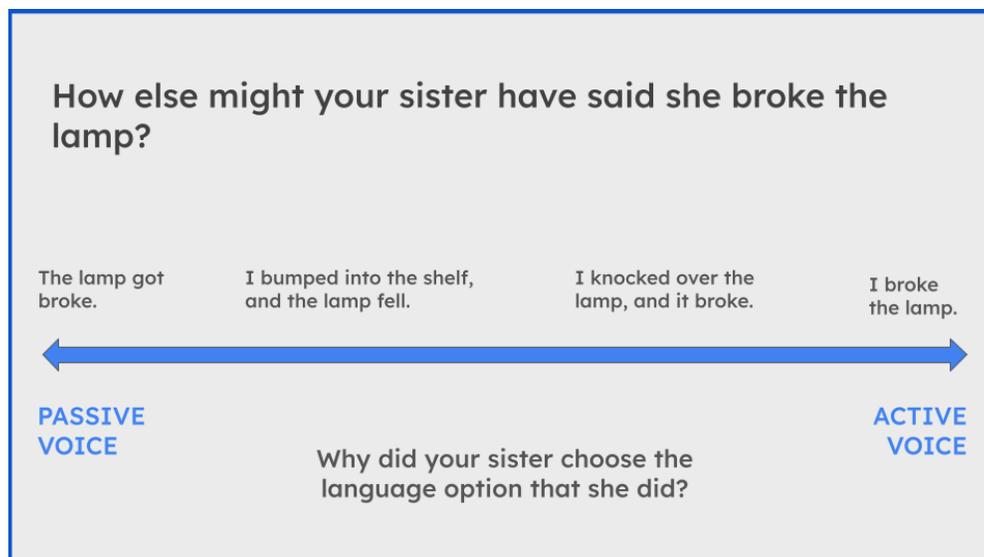


Teaching Passive Voice
From *grammar, y'all*
Dr. Michelle Devereaux

Overview of Steps

- 1. Multiple examples that relate to students' worlds—they need to see the pattern and purpose**
 - a. “What is going on here?”
- 2. Situations where the language move happens—let them play**
 - a. Make sure students can see the earlier examples, so they can mimic their structure.
 - b. As students are writing sentences, walk around the room and find a few student-created examples of active and passive voice—ask “may I use yours as an example?”
 - c. Discussions of **when, where, why** do we use this grammar move
- 3. Provide a simple definition of active and passive voice in the context of what students have already done**
 - a. Emphasize, through the examples you've already shared with the class, that students know this grammatical move. It may be that they just didn't know the name for it.
- 4. More play! Give them scenarios that allow them to explore how this language move is used in their world and the world around them.**



Step 1: Multiple Examples for Pattern and Purpose

Scenario: Looks like you deleted your group's digital folder with drafts of your group project. Oops.

What could you say?

- The folder was deleted.
- I deleted the folder.

Scenario: You didn't lock your car, and now some of your boyfriend's stuff is missing.

What could you say?

- The car wasn't locked.
- I didn't lock the car.

Scenario: You're helping a friend with posters for an event, but there's a big spelling error.

What could you say?

- The word on the poster was misspelled.'
- I misspelled the word on the poster.

Situations where the language move happens—let them play

- a. Make sure students can see the earlier examples, so they can mimic their structure.
 - b. As students are writing sentences, walk around the room and find a few student-created examples of active and passive voice—ask “may I use yours as an example?”
 - c. Discussions of **when, where, why** do we use this grammar move
1. You missed the free throw that would have won the game.
 2. You said something that hurt your friend's feelings.
 3. You forgot to set your alarm, and you were late for school.
 4. You sent a text to the wrong person, and the message upset them.
 5. You painted the set for theatre the wrong color.

Discussion questions:

- What do you notice?
- What patterns in these sentences?

- What characteristics?
- Why would you de-emphasize the doer in these sentences?
- After a class discussion, share the “by zombies” trick

3. Provide a simple definition of active and passive voice in the context of what students have already done.

- Focus on verb forms and “by” constructions. [See this video](#) for a full definition of passive voice.

4. More play! Give them scenarios that allow them to explore how this language move is used in their world and the world around them.

In teams of two, research a public apology (or a statement that passed for an apology) made by a celebrity, politician, or other person in the public eye. Locate a transcript of the apology and analyze its language. Specifically, consider the following language aspects:

- Use of active and passive voice
- Nominalized concepts and noun phrases (e.g., “this episode,” “these circumstances,” “what happened”) rather than direct naming of people and actions

Your goal will be to assess the degree to which the apology seems legitimate based on the language it uses. Prepare a poster presentation that specifically identifies interesting language choices and demonstrates your understanding.

Feel free to use the examples below. I marked the passive voice for you. :)

Influencer “Accountability” Video Transcript

I want to take a moment to address what’s been going around online this past week. **A lot has been said (by zombies)**, a lot of discussion about my recent content. I’ve had time to reflect, and I recognize that **mistakes were made (by zombies)**.

I never intended for anyone to feel hurt or disrespected, and I’m truly sorry for how **people were affected (by zombies)**. **Things were taken out of context (by zombies)**, but I also understand that impact matters more than intent. This whole experience has been overwhelming, and I’m learning from it.

Going forward, I’m committed to doing better, listening more, and being mindful of how my actions come across. I appreciate everyone who has reached out with constructive feedback, and I hope we can move forward together.

School “Statement to Families” After a Hallway Incident

Subject: Message to Our School Community

An incident was shared on social media (by zombies) earlier today. The incident does not reflect the values of our school, and we understand that **concerns have been raised by members of our community (note that this sentence already has a “by” construction)**.

The matter is currently being reviewed, and **appropriate steps are being taken (by zombies)** in accordance with school policies. Student privacy laws prevent us from sharing specific details, but we want to assure families that **the situation is being addressed (by zombies)**. **Support has been made available (by zombies)** to those impacted, and we are committed to maintaining a safe and respectful learning environment.

Thank you for your continued trust and partnership as we work through this matter together.