Active and Passive Voice

**Essential Information:**

*Voice* is the form a verb takes to indicate whether its subject acts or is acted upon. In the active voice, the subject of the sentence does the action; in the passive, the subject receives the action.

**What is the issue?**

Although both voices are grammatically correct, the active is usually more effective because it is simpler and more direct. Because the active voice emphasizes the doer of an action, it is usually clearer and more emphatic than the passive voice. Whenever possible, use active voice in your college writing.

**Passive Voice:**

When the subject of a verb receives the action – when it is acted upon – the verb is in the passive voice. Passive verbs, which include forms of the verb “be” (be, am, are, is, was, were, being, been) lack vigor because they convey no action.

Examples: A bad grade *was received* by the entire group.
          The early worm *is sometimes caught* by the early bird.

The passive voice is sometimes appropriate if you wish to emphasize the receiver of the action or to minimize the importance of the actor.

Examples: As the time for harvest approaches, the tobacco plants *are sprayed* with a chemical to retard the growth of suckers.
          The writer wished to focus on the tobacco plants, not on the people spraying them.

**Active Voice:**

When the subject of a verb does something – when it acts – the verb is in the active voice. Active verbs express meaning more emphatically and vigorously than passive verbs.

Examples: The committee *reached* a decision.
          The early bird sometimes *catches* the early worm.

To transform a sentence from the passive voice to the active voice, make the actor the subject of the sentence.

Example:
Passive – *The Bridge was written* by Hart Crane.
Active – Hart Crane *wrote The Bridge.*