

then deciding if the active/passive choice was the right one.⁴

My hope is that students will find their brief journey into the world of active and passive voice⁵ a bit more pleasant and interesting than a visit to the dentist's office. In any case, I want them to come away realizing that unlike dental cavities, passive voice can sometimes be a good thing. As law students who aspire to be effective users of language, they need passive voice, as well as active voice, as a tool in their writing belt. The trick, as always, is to know which tool to use when.

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⁴ For example, two of the three sentences in the opening paragraph of this column are written in active voice and one is in passive voice. Sentence 1: "I heard ..." active voice; sentence 2: "I agree ..." active voice; and sentence 3: "Passive voice has gotten ..." passive voice (no irony there). The doer of the action in the third sentence—whoever it was that gave passive voice a bad rap—is both unknown and relatively unimportant. At this point in the discussion, the emphasis has shifted to passive voice itself, so it is appropriately moved to the subject position in the sentence.

⁵ Essentially the same approach can be used with a class followed by a class discussion of active and passive voice sentences in a sample piece of writing.

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