

Passive Voice – ‘BY’ Phrase

Did you ever wonder why some passive voice sentences have the “by” phrase and others do not? **If the “by” phrase adds no value to the sentence, it is not necessary.**

Let’s look at the following two examples:

- A. Indigo was once widely used **by textile manufacturers** to dye clothing.
- B. Indigo was once widely used to dye clothing.

We can **safely omit the “by” phrase** in this case because **it is not essential to the meaning of the sentence**. Remember, the whole point of passive voice is to shift the focus from the agent to the object. By removing the agent entirely, we emphasize the importance of the object.

Exercise 1

Read the following sentences and remove the “by” phrase if possible. “By” phrases have been indicated with **bold font**.

- 1. His poetry has been widely distributed **by the publisher**.
- 2. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature **by the Nobel Prize Committee**.
- 3. The sanctions imposed on his country **by Norway** made it impossible for him to travel to Oslo to receive the prize.
- 4. She reacted angrily when accused of cheating **by the judge**.
- 5. The wheat, once separated from the chaff **by hand**, is now threshed **by machine**.

Exercise 2

Change the following sentences from **active voice to passive voice** unless the verb is intransitive (a verb that does not take a direct object). Omit the “by” phrase wherever possible.

- 1. Jacqueline memorized the text in its entirety.
- 2. Marta planted the tulips in autumn, and all winter long she anticipated the splash of colour they would impart to her garden in spring.
- 3. She dove into the deep end of the pool.

4. The sun set slowly in the northern summer.
5. The microbiologist studied the slides under her microscope.

Answers

Exercise 1

1. His poetry has been widely distributed.
2. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.
3. The sanctions imposed on his country by Norway made it impossible for him to travel to Oslo to receive the prize.
4. She reacted angrily when accused of cheating.
5. The wheat, once separated from the chaff by hand, is now threshed by machine.

Exercise 2

1. The text was memorized by Jacqueline in its entirety.
2. The tulips were planted in autumn and all winter long the splash of colour they would impart to her garden in spring was anticipated (by Marta).
3. **Intransitive** – No passive is possible because the verb “dive” has no direct object.
4. **Intransitive** – No passive is possible because the verb “set” has no direct object in this sentence.
5. The slides were studied by the microbiologist under her microscope.