

Passive Voice – the ‘by’ phrase

Did you ever wonder why some passive voice sentences have the “by phrase” and others don’t?

If the *by* phrase adds no value to the sentence, it is not necessary.

Let’s look at the following two examples:

1. Indigo was once widely used by textile manufacturers to dye clothing.	2. Indigo was once widely used to dye clothing.
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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.

Read the following sentences and remove the “*by* phrase” if possible.

1. His poetry has been widely distributed by his 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.

Now, 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.
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.

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ANSWERS:

Read the following sentences and remove the “by phrase” if possible.

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Now, 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.
The text was memorized by Jacqueline 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.
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. She dove into the deep end of the pool.
Intransitive – No passive is possible because “dove” has no direct object.
4. The sun set slowly in the northern summer.
Intransitive – No passive is possible because “set” has no direct object.
5. The microbiologist studied the slides under her microscope.
The slides were studied by the microbiologist under her microscope.