Avoiding Passive Voice Verbs

VOCABULARY

Active Voice
Verbs in the active voice indicate that the subject is performing the action.

Passive Voice
Verbs in the passive voice indicate that the subject is having something done to it. The subject is inactive.

THE RULE
1. Avoid writing wordy sentences by using active verbs.
2. Many times, you can spot a passive voice verb by finding a “to be” verb (is, was, are, were) followed by present or past participle verb (ending in -ing or -ed).

PRACTICE Let’s practice using Active Voice

Error: The book is being read by Crystal.  
(Sounds wordy; note the “is being” part of the verb).

Correction: Crystal reads the book.  
(Nice and concise!).

Error: The play was rated by The Dayton Daily News to be one of the top plays of last year’s season.

Correction: The Dayton Daily News rated the play to be one of the best.

Error: The class was taught by an expert in foreign affairs, so presentations done by students were graded accurately. (Very wordy; note how “was” accompanies the past tense of the first verb; note how “done” is still passive voice, despite the lack of a helping verb).

Correction: An expert in foreign affairs taught the course and graded students’ presentations accurately.