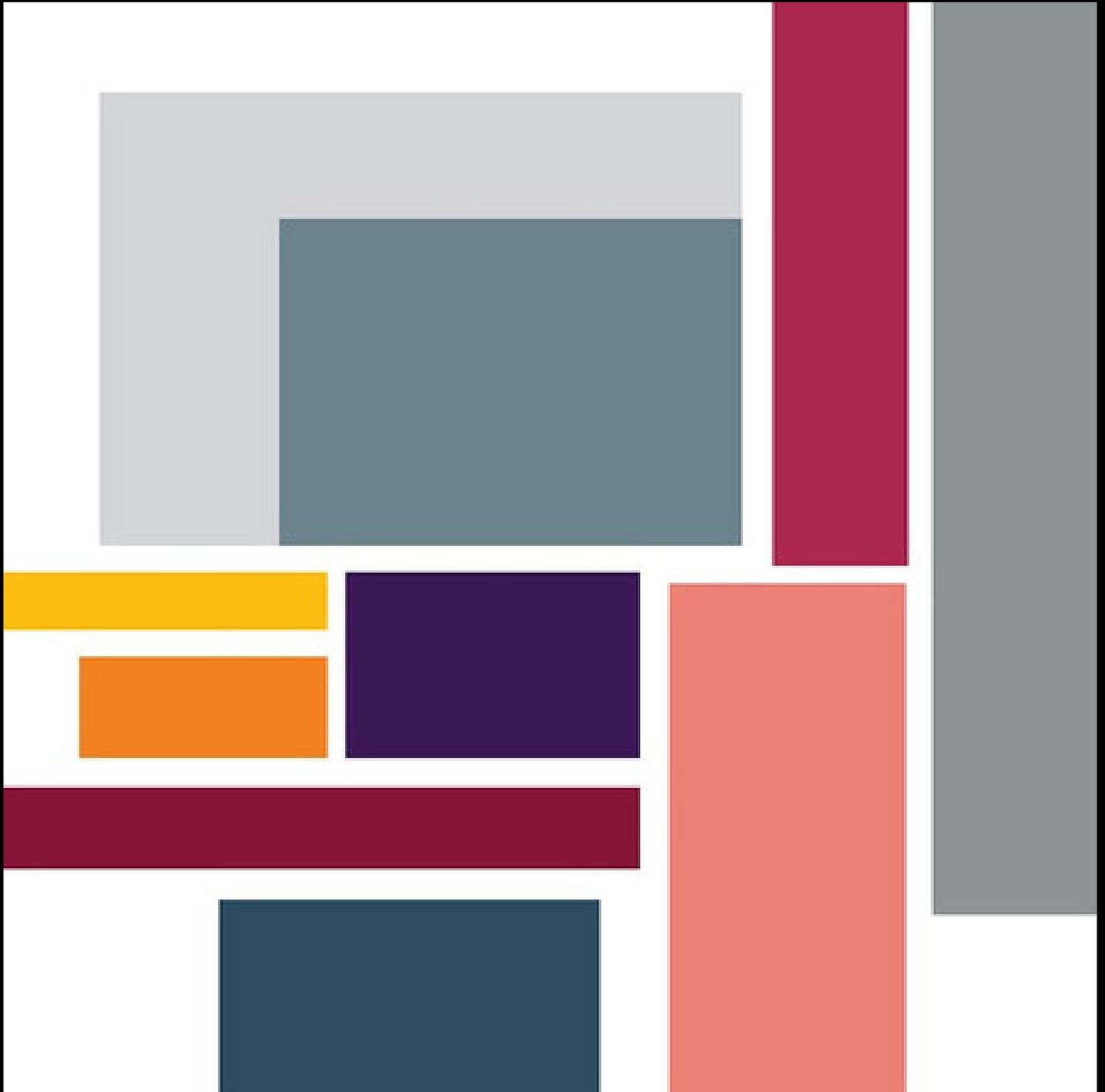


Active vs. Passive



Active vs. Passive

Lesson & Exercises

In an **active** construction, the subject typically precedes the object. The emphasis is on the person or thing performing the action.

William Shakespeare wrote Hamlet.
subject **verb** **object**

In a **passive** construction, the subject and the object are flipped: *x does y* becomes *y is done by x*. The emphasis is on the object of the action. The passive includes a form of the verb *to be* + *past participle* and the preposition *by*.

Hamlet was written by William Shakespeare.
subject **verb** **preposition** **object**

“Half passive” constructions are also common, e.g., *Hamlet was written*: in such cases, *by* + *object* is only implied.

Compare the following sentences:

Active	Passive
Jamal drinks the water.	The water is drunk by Jamal.
The students in Professor Garcia’s Chemistry class conducted an experiment yesterday.	An experiment was conducted by the students in Professor Garcia’s Chemistry class yesterday.
A lack of concern for workers’ environments causes some tensions between bosses and their employees.	Some tensions between bosses and their employees are caused by a lack of concern for workers’ environments.

Note that a form of the verb *to be* cannot be omitted.

Incorrect: *Hamlet* **written** by William Shakespeare.

Correct: *Hamlet* **was written** by William Shakespeare.

In addition, the passive should not be confused with the (active) present perfect tense, which is formed by combining *has* or *have* with the *past participle*. Note that this construction does not include a form of *to be*.

Pres. Perfect: The students **have studied** two Shakespeare plays this year.

Passive: Two Shakespeare plays **have been studied** by the students this year.

To form the passive in any given tense, conjugate *to be* in that tense. Then, add the past participle of the main verb, flip the subject and the object, and add *by*.

For example, the sentence *He will write the play* (future) becomes *The play will be written by him*.

The following chart lists active vs. passive constructions in all of the major tenses.

Tense	Active	Passive
Present	We play the game.	The game is played by us.
Present Perfect	We have played the game.	The game has been played by us.
Past	We played the game.	The game was played by us.
Future	We will play the game.	The game will be played by us.
Future Perfect	We will have played the game.	The game will have been played by us.
Conditional	We would play the game.	The game would be played by us.
Past Conditional	We would have played the game.	The game would have been played by us.