Aggie Grammar Guide: Passive vs. Active Voice (Style)

Answer Key

Intermediate Practice

What follows are possible revisions to alleviate passive construction in order to clarify ideas or make the sentence more precise.

1) Japan’s earthquakes are the most damaging in the world.
2) The first paragraph of the short story reveals this when Montresor says: “I must not only punish, but punish with impunity” (Mays 108).
3) Pesticides are annihilating the honey bee.
4) The meaning of the food used in Catholicism connects these two countries.
5) The desire to determine Montresor’s motives compels the reader to “decipher the circumstances in the story” (Baraban 48).

Advanced Practice

What follows are possible revisions that alleviate passive constructions while clarifying meaning.

1) The second experiment revealed that teenagers’ perception of sexual activity depended on whether they were exposed to sexual behavior, sexual plans, or the risks of sexual activity at a young age.
2) Historians argue that this kept Russia going for as long as it did before World War 1.
3) When people comment that I have a so-called accent, it troubles my conscience because of what that might mean about my race and ethnicity.
4) In addition, new transportation has been developed. (NECESSARY PASSIVE: We don’t know, nor does it matter, who developed it; what matters is it was developed).
5) Once designers learned more about bicycles, they created a chain that linked the two wheels. (OR: A better understanding of how a bicycle functions necessitated the creation of a chain that linked the two wheels.)
6) As one university that offers online education, Humboldt State’s conclusions merit attention.