RECOGNIZING PASSIVE VOICE

ACTIVE VOICE
The subject performs the action of the verb.

Chris wrote the report.

Subject/actor Verb Object/recipient

What’s good about this example?
It clearly identifies both the actor and the action. Also, the sentence is concise.

PASSIVE VOICE
The subject receives the action of the verb.

The report was written.

Subject/recipient Form of "To be" verb + past participle of the verb

This version is grammatical, but it is missing important information that the reader may want to know. Who wrote the report?

The report was written by Chris.

Subject/recipient Form of "To be" verb + past participle of the verb Preposition "by" followed by the actor

This version supplies the missing information about the actor, but it is less direct and concise than the first example.

WHEN TO USE PASSIVE VOICE
Sometimes passive voice is an appropriate choice.

- When the actor is indefinite or unknown:
  The data was processed and then analyzed.
- When the focus is on the action or recipient, not the actor:
  In a review of his report, significant findings were uncovered.

For more information, see the GWC’s online resources or work with a writing coach!