Passive Voice

Worksheet 1: Why Choose the Passive?

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: The Passive as an Information Tool

At C1 the passive is a stylistic choice, not a rule. It serves **end-focus** (new/heavy information last), **topic continuity** (keep the same subject across sentences), **agent suppression** (when the doer is unknown, obvious, generic, or best hidden), and **objectivity** in academic and technical writing.

Motivation	Why the passive helps	Example
End-focus	defer the new/heavy element	The award was won by **a total unknown**.
Topic continuity	keep the topic as subject	**The bridge** opened in 1930 and was widened in 1980.
Agent suppression	doer irrelevant/hidden	The samples **were contaminated**.
Objectivity	focus on process, not doer	The mixture **is then heated**.

Part A – Justify the Passive

State the main reason the passive is preferable in each case.

#	Sentence	Motivation
1	Penicillin was discovered in 1928.	
2	The cathedral was begun in 1245 and was completed a century later.	
3	The bonus was awarded to the entire research team.	
4	The solution is filtered and then evaporated.	

Part B – Active or Passive for the Flow?

Choose the version with better information flow (given topic in brackets).

1. (the manuscript) A collector bought the manuscript. / The manuscript was bought by a collector. _____
2. (Marie Curie) Radium was discovered by Marie Curie. / Marie Curie discovered radium. _____

Score: ____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Agency, Blame & Evasion

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: The Politics of Leaving Out the Agent

Because the passive lets us omit the agent, it can distribute or dodge responsibility (*Mistakes were made*). Skilled readers notice suppressed agents; skilled writers choose consciously — to be tactful, to generalise, or, less admirably, to evade. Restoring the agent (*by…*) or switching to active reveals what a passive conceals.

Passive (agent hidden)	Agent restored / active	Effect of hiding
Mistakes were made.	We made mistakes.	avoids naming who
The funds were misused.	The director misused the funds.	softens blame
It was decided to close the ward.	The board decided to close the ward.	diffuses responsibility

Part A – Restore the Hidden Agent

Rewrite in the active, supplying a plausible agent, and note what changes.

1. Errors were overlooked during the audit. → _____
2. Promises were broken. → _____
3. The report was buried. → _____

Part B – Tactful, Generic, or Evasive?

Classify each agentless passive by why the agent is omitted.

#	Sentence	Tactful / generic / evasive
1	Your application has been rejected.	
2	Aluminium is extracted from bauxite.	
3	Regrettably, funds were diverted from the project.	
4	English is spoken here.	

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Register & Cohesion

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: The Passive Across Text Types

Passive density varies by register: scientific method sections and legal/official prose favour it; narrative and persuasive writing use it sparingly. Overuse produces heavy, agentless, lifeless prose; strategic use aids cohesion by managing what comes first (theme) and last (focus) across a paragraph.

Register	Passive tendency	Reason
Scientific method	high	objectivity; process focus
Legal / official	high	impersonality; generality
Journalism	moderate	front newsworthy patient, hedge agents
Narrative / persuasion	low	agency and energy matter

Part A – Fix the Overuse

This over-passive sentence is heavy. Rewrite it more naturally, using active where it helps.

> *It was decided by the committee that the proposal that had been submitted by the team should be reviewed before a final decision was made.*

_____

Part B – Passive for Cohesion

Rewrite the second sentence in the passive so its theme links to the first sentence.

1. The council approved a new library. A local firm will build it. _____
2. Scientists identified a new enzyme. Further trials will test it. _____

Part C – Match Register

Rewrite "We heated the sample and then we measured it" for a scientific method section.

_____

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Critical Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Reading

> Few constructions are as quietly powerful as the passive. It can be used to place the important thing first, as when a discovery is announced before its discoverer is named. It can be deployed to keep a topic in view across a paragraph, so that the reader is never made to lose the thread. And it can, of course, be exploited to bury an agent: when it is reported that "cuts will have to be made", one is entitled to ask by whom. The construction itself is neutral; what is done with it is not.

1. Identify every passive in the passage and state, for each, its motivation (end-focus, topic continuity, agent suppression, or objectivity).
2. "cuts will have to be made" hides an agent. Rewrite it in the active with a plausible subject and comment on the difference.
3. The passage is itself passive-heavy. Is this appropriate here? Justify with reference to genre.
4. Evaluate the claim that "the construction itself is neutral; what is done with it is not."

Part B – Extended Analytical Writing

Write a formal analytical paragraph of 160–200 words on: "The passive is a tool of emphasis, not evasion — until it isn't." You must include and underline: (1) one passive used for **end-focus**; (2) one used for **topic continuity**; (3) one **agentless** passive whose suppression you can justify; (4) one **reporting passive**; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to claim strength.

#	Line
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

Features: _____ / 5 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C1 Level, Passive Voice

Worksheet 1 – Part A (model)

1 agent suppression / objectivity — the discoverer is unimportant here, the fact matters. · 2 topic continuity — "the cathedral" stays the subject across both clauses. · 3 end-focus — the new information ("the entire research team") lands last. · 4 objectivity — scientific process, doer irrelevant.

Worksheet 1 – Part B (model)

1 Passive — keeps "the manuscript" (given topic) first; the collector is new. · 2 Active — "Marie Curie" is the given topic; radium is the new focus at the end.

Worksheet 2 – Part A (model)

1 The auditors overlooked errors during the audit. (names who is responsible) · 2 The government broke its promises. (assigns blame) · 3 The ministry buried the report. (reveals the concealed agent).

Worksheet 2 – Part B (model)

1 tactful — softens a rejection. · 2 generic — scientific/general truth. · 3 evasive — avoids naming who diverted funds. · 4 generic — "people in general".

Worksheet 3 – Part A (model)

The committee decided that the team's proposal should be reviewed before making a final decision. (one agentless passive retained for the review is acceptable; the point is to lighten the sentence.)

Worksheet 3 – Part B (model)

1 The council approved a new library. It will be built by a local firm. · 2 Scientists identified a new enzyme. It will be tested in further trials.

Worksheet 3 – Part C (model)

The sample was heated and then measured. (agentless, past passive — standard for a method section.)

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 "as are/can be used" (general); "a discovery is announced" (end-focus — before the discoverer); "its discoverer is named" (topic continuity/end-focus); "the reader is never made to lose the thread" (topic continuity); "it is reported that…", "cuts will have to be made" (agent suppression); "what is done with it" (generic). · 2 e.g. "The government will have to make cuts." — naming the agent exposes who bears responsibility, which the passive conceals. · 3 Appropriate: the passage is an analytical/expository discussion of the passive, a genre that tolerates and even benefits from measured passive use for objectivity and topic control. · 4 A strong answer agrees the grammatical construction carries no inherent morality, but notes that the choice to suppress an agent is a rhetorical act with ethical weight in context — hence "what is done with it is not" neutral.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor	Marks

End-focus passive	Defers new/heavy element, correct	0–5
Topic-continuity passive	Maintains subject across sentences	0–5
Justified agentless passive	Suppression defended	0–5
Reporting passive	it-pattern or subject+to-inf, correct	0–5
Argument & length	160–200 words; developed with hedges	0–5