



3Cs MEDICAL WRITING

E D I T 4

Prefer the Active Voice



*The fourth of twelve edits for clear,
concise, coherent English.*

SEAMAN MEDICAL, INC.

Why it matters

“In general, authors should use the active voice, except in instances in which the author is unknown or the interest focuses on what is acted upon.”

— *AMA Manual of Style*

1

Active sentences are shorter and easier to read.

2

They show clearly who did what.

3

They are easier to write correctly.

The SVO pattern



The subject performs the action on the object.

The investigator reviewed the data.

Your readers can follow this sentence structure easily.

A passive-voice sentence

PASSIVE VOICE — THE DOER IS MISSING

“The data were reviewed.”

Who reviewed them?

Keep reading...

The passive voice hides the doer.
The reader cannot tell who acted.

See the passive voice

The passive verb (amber) hides the doer.

The data **were
reviewed.**



PASSIVE VERB

The doer: nowhere

Without the doer, the reader must guess who performed the action.

Rewrite in active voice

Now we know who acted.

**The investigator
reviewed the data.**

Doer: identified

Reader understands immediately.

K E Y P O I N T

Let the reader know
who did what.

*Generally use the active voice unless
the doer is unknown or unimportant.*

