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Using the Active Voice While Writing Business Messages

Effective communication is essential in the business world, and one of the most significant aspects of writing business messages is how you choose to convey your thoughts. The use of active voice is a critical element that can significantly enhance clarity, engagement, and impact in your communications. This article will explore the importance of the active voice in business writing, offer tips for implementation, and provide examples to illustrate its benefits.

Understanding Active vs. Passive Voice

In order to appreciate the advantages of using the active voice, it is important to understand the difference between active and passive voice.

Active Voice

In active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action. This direct approach makes the writing more engaging and easier to understand. For example:

- "The manager approved the proposal."

In this sentence, "the manager" (the subject) is performing the action of approving.

Passive Voice

In passive voice, the subject receives the action rather than performing it. This can lead to vague or convoluted sentences. For example:

- "The proposal was approved by the manager."

Here, the focus is on "the proposal," which can obscure who is taking action, potentially leading to confusion.

The Importance of Using Active Voice in Business Messages

Using the active voice in business writing is crucial for several reasons:

1. Clarity

Active voice sentences are typically more straightforward and clear. Readers can quickly grasp the message without sifting through complex structures. For example, instead of saying, "A decision will be made by the committee," you can say, "The committee will make a decision." The latter is clearer and more direct.

2. Engagement

Business messages often need to capture the reader's attention, especially when discussing important matters. Active voice creates a sense of immediacy and energy. This engagement can be particularly beneficial in persuasive writing, where you want to motivate the reader to take action.

3. Responsibility

Active voice assigns responsibility clearly, making it evident who is accountable for specific actions. This is particularly important in business environments where clarity of roles and responsibilities can impact project outcomes. For instance, instead of saying, "Mistakes were made," it is more effective to say, "The team made mistakes." This clarity can foster a culture of accountability.

4. Brevity

Active voice tends to be more concise, reducing unnecessary words and making messages easier to digest. For example, "We will send the report tomorrow" is shorter and more to the point than, "The report will be sent by us tomorrow."

How to Use Active Voice Effectively

Incorporating active voice into your business writing is achievable with a few strategies. Here are some tips to help you make the transition effectively:

1. Identify the Subject

Before writing a sentence, identify who or what will be performing the action. This subject should come first in your sentence structure.

- Example: Instead of writing, "The report was completed by John," write "John completed the report."

2. Use Strong Verbs

Choose strong, specific verbs that convey action clearly. This will enhance your writing and reduce the need for additional clarifying phrases.

- Example: Instead of saying, "She is in charge of the project," say, "She leads the project."

3. Revise Passive Constructions

During the editing phase, review your work for passive constructions. Convert them to active voice where possible.

- Example: Change "The budget was approved by the board" to "The board approved the budget."

4. Keep Sentences Short and Direct

Aim for brevity in your sentences. Short sentences can often be restructured into active voice, making them easier to read.

- Example: Instead of writing, "The decision regarding the budget was made by the finance department," you can say, "The finance department made the budget decision."

5. Encourage Feedback

If you work in a team, encourage colleagues to review each other's work for voice clarity. Peers can often catch instances of passive voice that you may overlook.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

While using active voice is beneficial, there are common pitfalls that writers should avoid:

1. Overuse of Jargon

While jargon can sometimes enhance communication within specific industries, it can also confuse readers. Strive for clarity over complexity, regardless of the voice used.

- Tip: Use simpler language to ensure your message is accessible to all readers.

2. Neglecting the Audience

Always consider your audience when writing. While active voice is generally more engaging, some contexts may require a more formal tone that can occasionally lean towards passive constructions.

- Tip: Adjust your writing style based on the audience's preferences and expectations.

3. Ignoring the Context

In some cases, passive voice can be appropriate, especially when the focus should be on the action rather than the actor. For example, in a scientific report, you might say, "The experiment was conducted," to focus on the results rather than the researcher.

- Tip: Analyze the context to determine whether active or passive voice serves your message best.

Examples of Active Voice in Business Communication

To further illustrate the benefits of active voice, here are some examples of how to transform passive sentences into active ones:

- Passive: "A training session will be held by the HR department."

Active: "The HR department will hold a training session."

- Passive: "The minutes were recorded by Sarah."

Active: "Sarah recorded the minutes."

- Passive: "Sales were boosted by the new marketing strategy."

Active: "The new marketing strategy boosted sales."

Conclusion

In conclusion, using the active voice while writing business messages can greatly enhance clarity, engagement, and effectiveness. By focusing on the subject performing the action, strong verb choices, and concise sentence structures, writers can communicate their thoughts more efficiently. While it's important to remain flexible and consider the context and audience, the advantages of the active voice in business writing are undeniable. As you continue to refine your writing style, keep these principles in mind to produce clearer,

more impactful business communications.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the active voice in business writing?

The active voice is a sentence structure where the subject performs the action of the verb, making the writing clearer and more direct. For example, 'The manager approved the project' is in active voice.

Why is using the active voice important in business messages?

Using the active voice enhances clarity, reduces ambiguity, and makes the message more engaging, which is essential for effective communication in business.

How can I identify if I am using the active voice?

To identify the active voice, look for sentences where the subject comes first and performs the action, such as 'Our team completed the report' rather than 'The report was completed by our team.'

What are some examples of sentences in active voice?

Examples include: 'The sales team exceeded their targets,' 'The CEO announced the new strategy,' and 'Our customers appreciate our service.'

Can you give an example of a passive voice sentence and its active voice equivalent?

A passive voice sentence: 'The proposal was submitted by the team.' Active voice equivalent: 'The team submitted the proposal.'

How does the active voice impact reader engagement?

The active voice tends to be more dynamic and lively, which can capture the reader's attention and encourage them to engage with the content more fully.

What are some common mistakes to avoid when using the active voice?

Common mistakes include overcomplicating sentences, using jargon, or incorrectly identifying the subject, which can lead to confusion or lack of clarity.

In what contexts should I prioritize the active voice?

Prioritize the active voice in reports, emails, proposals, and any communication where clarity and directness are essential for understanding.

Are there any exceptions where passive voice might be acceptable?

Yes, passive voice can be acceptable in situations where the doer is unknown or less important than the action itself, such as in formal reports or when focusing on results.

What tips can help me write more in the active voice?

To write in the active voice, focus on the subject of your sentences, keep sentences straightforward, and revise passive constructions by identifying the actor and rephrasing accordingly.

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