



CONSULTING GROUPSM
the people side of business strategy

TiDbits on writing[®] part 1

LETTER FROM TDCG

We are pleased to bring a new series of articles – *TiDbits on Writing*[®] – to clients, colleagues, and anyone seeking to be a better writer.

These practical tips will help readers tackle some of the major stumbling blocks in writing on the job – whether writing reports, proposals, or even e-mails. We’ll cover issues like how to write with clarity, how to write compelling leads, and even how to use *who* versus *whom*. Enjoy . . . and give us feedback on what you learn!

— *Laura Winterroth*
Managing Director



TiDbits

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Active Voice

When Microsoft Word’s grammar check warns you that you’re writing in the “passive voice,” do you know what that means? And when it gives you the option to change to the active voice, do you know what to do?

Let us help you answer “Yes!” to both questions.

How to Spot the Passive

Look at the following sentence:

The window was smashed by the burglar.

How can you tell it’s written in the passive voice? Clues in the two-part verb give it away:

- 1) A form of the verb “to be” – in this case, **was**
- 2) Combined with a past participle (usually a verb ending in “-ed”) – here, **smashed**

*The window **was smashed** by the burglar.*

Using the passive voice produces weak, dull, low-impact writing. It’s awkwardly structured, lacks oomph, and pussyfoots around the issue. (It looks as though you don’t want to blame the burglar!)

The active voice, on the other hand, makes your messages:

- More direct and forceful.
- More vigorous and emphatic.
- Easier to read.

Spotting the Passive Voice

Form of “To Be”		Past Participle
is	+	compiled
was	+	ordered
will be	+	broken

How to Convert to Active

So, how do you turn things around? To put the “burglar” sentence into the active voice, simply make *the doer of the action* the subject of the sentence. If the burglar did the action, just say it!

*The burglar **smashed** the window.*

Presto! You are now writing in the active voice.

For business writers, sentences like “**Employees will be expected to follow policy guidelines**” gain greater force when transformed into “**We expect employees to follow policy guidelines.**”

Give your writing strength and clarity by putting your subject in its proper place . . . and holding it accountable! That’s the active voice. It will have a profound effect on punching up your writing. □

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