Writing Reports: How to Get People to "Get Up and Listen!"

By Keri Spielvogle, B.S. , Ed./English, M.C.D., CCC-SLP

How do you make your report writing exciting? How do you grab peoples' attention and spark their interest? You write in the active tense! As educators, writing to and for others is an important part of the job. Make your readers read and understand more of what you write. Using the active tense gives report writing a personal feel, but with a professional touch. Try writing in the active tense today.

Seriously, what is the BIG DEAL anyway?

There is a difference between active and passive writing, even if you've never noticed it. Read the following two paragraphs and choose the one that most appeals to you.

The /k/ sound was produced by Bobby with 40% accuracy. His tongue was being moved with jerky, inconsistent motions. Although having been introduced to the correct production, the sound was still being articulated as /t/.

Or:

Bobby produced the /k/ sound with 40% accuracy. His tongue was moving with jerky, inconsistent motions. Although having introduced Bobby to the correct production, he continued to articulate the sound as /t/.

If you're like the fifteen out of fifteen people who read this paragraph, you probably chose the second one. Why? Well, it's more direct, to the point, attention-grabbing and it's written in the ACTIVE tense. Writing in the active tense not only makes reports clearer and more concise, but using this tense for letters of persuasion, complaint, and information elicits the best reactions from readers.

But, how do know which tense is which?

It's really not too difficult. When you think of active tense, think ACTION. Passive tense writing is "slower" and "lazier." But, if that's not enough to tell the difference, try this handy chart.

VERB: to produce

TENSE	PASSIVE VOICE	ACTIVE VOICE
Present	is produced	produces
Present Progressive	is being produced	is producing
Past	was produced	produced
Past Progressive	was being produced	was producing
Past Perfect	had been produced (by)	had produced
Present Perfect	have been produced (by)	had produced
Future	will be produced	will produce
Present Infinitive	to have been produced	to produce
Present Participle	being produced	producing
Perfect Participle	having been produced	having produced

That's it! When in doubt, plug your own words into each of the categories to make sure you don't slip into the passive. Put some spark into your writing with active tense!