

## Noticing Passive Voice

*Instructions: Read the following passages from the article "From Prison to Professor" and highlight all verbs in the passive voice that you can find. Some passages have more than one verb in the passive voice.*

Introduction: Dr. Andrisse discusses access to high education for people who **are**, or previously **were**, **incarcerated**.

Paragraph 2: People's prior convictions **should not be held** against them in their pursuit of higher learning.

Paragraph 3: I also believe more **must be done** to remove the various barriers that exist **between formerly incarcerated** individuals such as myself and higher education.

Paragraph 5: A person who once sold illegal drugs on the street could become tomorrow's medical doctor. But this can only happen if such a person, and the many others in similar situations, **are given** the chance.

Paragraph 9: Roughly 2.2 million people in the United States **are** essentially **locked away** in cages. About 1 in 5 of those people **are locked up** for drug offenses.

Paragraph 11: I **started** selling drugs and **getting involved** with other crimes at a very young age. I **was arrested** for the first time at age 14.

Paragraph 16: Despite these facts, education is woefully lacking among those **being held** in America's jails and prisons. Nearly 30 percent of America's incarcerated – about 690,000 people – **are released** each year and only 60 percent of those individuals have a GED or high school diploma, **compared to** 90 percent of the overall of U.S. population over age 25. And less than 3 percent of the people **released from** incarceration each year have a college degree, **compared to** 40 percent of the U.S. population.

Paragraph 17: Due to complications of diabetes, my father **had** his legs **amputated**. He fell into a coma and lost his battle with Type 2 diabetes. I **was devastated**. This experience made me want to learn more about how to fight this disease.

Paragraph 19: I finished near the top of my graduate school class, suggesting that I **was** likely **qualified** for the programs that rejected me.

Paragraph 20: Based on the difficulty I experienced in going from prison to becoming a college professor, I believe there are things that **should be done** to remove barriers for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people who wish to pursue higher education.

Paragraph 23: This program is at-risk of **being discontinued** at the end of 2018. Historically, some have argued that allowing Pell dollars **to be used** by those in prison takes precious Pell dollars from people who did not violate the law. However, the current Second Chance Pell pilot funding **being directed** to prisons, \$30 million, accounts for 0.1 percent of the total \$28 billion of Pell funding. Even if the program **were expanded**, based on historical levels, it would still amount to one-half of 1 percent of all Pell funding. This **is justified** by the impact that Pell dollars would have in prison in terms of reducing recidivism.

Paragraph 26: This question also disproportionately affects people of color, since people of color **are** disproportionately **impacted** by the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the question runs the risk of making formerly incarcerated people feel isolated and less valuable than those who've never gotten in trouble with the law.

## Choosing Between Active and Passive Voice

Find verbs in the sentences. Decide whether each verb is used in the active or passive voice. Then decide whether any changes need to be made to make an active verb passive or vice versa. Be prepared to explain your answer. If you decide that a change is necessary, write down the revised version.

Passive voice is marked in **yellow**; active voice in **blue**. Comments on the use of verbs are **bolded**.

1. More **must be done** to remove the various barriers that **exist** between formerly incarcerated individuals and higher education.

**Changing “must be done” into active voice would require including a subject who must remove the barriers. The choice of passive focuses on the problem and the action that must take place, and it can be assumed that the author wants everyone to help solve the problem.**

2. A person who once **sold** drugs **can become** a medical doctor if society **gives** the person the chance.

**Passive voice – if the person is given the chance – would work better. Using active voice – with the subject “society” creates the impression that the author blames the society.**

3. Roughly 2.2 million people in the United States **are** essentially **locked away** in cages. About 1 in 5 of those people **are locked up** for drug offenses.

**Passive voice focuses on the action here, instead of emphasizing who locks people away.**

4. I **started** selling drugs and **getting involved** with other crimes at a very young age. The police **arrested** me for the first time at age 14.

**“The police arrested me” would be better in passive voice – I was arrested. It is common knowledge that the police arrest people, so the subject does not need to be named.**

5. Some people in the drug world **wanted** me to keep moving drugs.

**Active voice works well here. Passive would sound awkward.**

6. I **finished** near the top of my graduate school class, suggesting that I **was** likely **qualified** for the programs that I **was rejected** by.

**Two passive expressions next to each other sound repetitive. The second passive verb should be changed into active: “programs that rejected me”.**

7. Educational institutions **should do** something to remove barriers for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people who **wish** to pursue higher education.

**Changing the active “should do” into passive “something should be done” would allow to remove the subject “educational institutions” and would produce the impression that everyone should be part of removing these barriers.**

8. People of color **are** disproportionately **impacted** by the criminal justice system.

**The use of passive draws attention to the subject – people of color. Changing the sentence into passive would have less of an emphasis and is not recommended.**

9. Less than 3 percent of the people who **are released** from incarceration each year **have** a college degree, **compared** to 40 percent of the U.S. population.

**Good choice of verbs in this sentence.**

10. Opportunities for education **could be increased** if federal policymakers **removed** Question 23 on the federal student aid form that **asks** if applicants **have been convicted** of drug crimes.

**If the intent of the author is to show who should remove Question 23, the first clause would be better in active voice: “Federal policymakers could increase opportunities for education if they removed ...”**

## Error Correction – Passive Voice

*Instructions: The following sentences contain errors in the use of passive voice. Find and correct these errors.*

### From Prison to Professor

1. People's prior convictions should not be held against them in their pursuit of higher learning.
2. More must be done to remove the various barriers that exist between formerly incarcerated individuals.
3. Roughly 2.2 million people in the United States are essentially locked away in cages. About 1 in 5 of those people are locked up for drug offenses.
4. I started selling drugs and getting involved with other crimes at a very young age. I was arrested for the first time at age 14.
5. Less than 3 percent of the people released from incarceration each year have a college degree, compared to 40 percent of the U.S. population.
6. Based on the difficulty I experienced in going from prison to becoming a college professor, I believe there are things that should be done to remove barriers for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people who wish to pursue higher education.
7. This program is at-risk of being discontinued at the end of 2018. Even if the program were expanded, based on historical levels, it would still amount to one-half of 1 percent of all Pell funding.
8. People of color are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the question runs the risk of making formerly incarcerated people feel isolated and less valuable than those who've never gotten in trouble with the law.