Passive or Active Voice

Passive voice occurs when the object of an action is used as the subject. Passive voice, although not grammatically incorrect, often detracts from the tone of the paper and results in awkward phrasing. Writers should try to use active voice whenever possible. An easy way to spot passive voice is to remark where a "to be" verb and past participle are together (e.g. was given, is impacted by).

Active Voice:
Molly threw the ball to Aaliyah.

Passive Voice:
The ball was thrown to Aaliyah.

Why avoid the passive voice
Passive voice often leads to wordy constructions that rely heavily on strings of prepositional phrasing. Removing it can make your sentences more concise and direct. Passive voice can also come across as vague and can obscure the actor in a sentence, making your readers ask, "But who threw the ball?"

How to remove passive voice
Here are a few methods to remove passive voice from the sentence:
1. Rearrange the sentence to add a subject.
   Example:
   The Great Depression <u>was caused</u> by the crash of the stock market
   The crash of the stock market <u>caused</u> the Great Depression
2. Use a different verb that emphasizes the subject.
   Example:
   The French army <u>was led</u> by Napoleon at the turn of the nineteenth century.
   The French army <u>displayed loyalty</u> to Napoleon at the turn of the nineteenth century.
3. Adapt the passive voice into an adjective.
   Example:
   Holden Caulfield <u>was rejected</u> by his peers at Pencey Prep, so he left for New York.
   <u>Rejected</u> by his peers at Pencey Prep, Holden Caulfield left for New York.

When to use passive voice
Sometimes, passive voice is a useful tool in writing:
1. When the expression requires passive voice.
   Example: "Søren Kierkegaard was born May 5, 1813" sounds better than "Søren Kierkegaard's mother bore him on May 5, 1813."
2. When describing experiment procedures in lab reports or scientific papers.
   Example: The beaker was filled with 25mL of water.
3. When the subject is unknown.
   Example: These documents were saved from the eruption at Pompeii.
4. When you want to emphasize the object over the subject.
   Example: No, the *jewel* was stolen by the crook.