

Prompt for Paragraph #5 | Skill or Attribute: Avoiding Passive

Let us continue with triad paragraphs, but in order to maintain variety let us again go with pre-fabricated triads. There are four below, all based on the first four sections of Unit 4. Choose one on which to write. Recall that the basic goal of your paragraph is to identify and explore the historical relationship(s) among the three items of the triad. Focus above all on *the connections*, rather than addressing each item in isolation.

conservatism revolution constitutions	nationalism liberalism industrialization	Darwinism social Darwinism imperialism	Jews Africans race
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The principal skill or attribute for this paragraph is **avoiding passive constructions**. In some cases the passive is unavoidable. But this is rare. In the vast majority of cases, the author of a text can easily convert a passive sentence into an active one. The active form is preferable because it indicates who actually performed the action, as opposed to leaving the matter mysterious. Thus instead of writing, *The French Revolution was criticized for its excesses*, you can instead write, *Conservative thinkers like Edmund Burke criticized the French Revolution for its excesses*. As you initially write the essay, you may likely use passive constructions, which is fine for getting the ideas out on paper. But as you revise and you encounter such cases of passive, ask yourself: Is it not possible to make this active and thereby to indicate the agent the performed the action? In most cases it will be possible, so go ahead and do it. Recognizing that on some occasions the passive can be preferable, I will say that any essay that includes more than two instances of passive construction will be returned to the author as if he or she did not submit the essay.

The same basic rules and advice continue to apply, so they are again:

- Previous skills and attributes—title, topic sentence, and evidence—are as important for this paragraph as for previous ones.
- The passive form should occur in your paragraph no more than twice—and preferably not at all.
- The text you submit should consist of one paragraph. Not three. Not two. Not twelve. One.
- Underline or **make bold** the three items of your triad in the first sentence.
- The best triad-paragraphs are the ones in which the author includes **all three items in the first sentence**, which becomes the thesis. Read that sentence again. Then again. And once more.
- Evidence from sources should take the form mostly of paraphrasing, with only limited direct citation. If one quote represents ¼ of your paragraph, then a substantial portion of the text is not really yours. Under no circumstances should you have a block quotation. Double- and triple-check when you quote to be sure that you have done so accurately.
- On the matter of citation, simply use this system: (Hirst, 25) or (Reader, 7) or (Lecture 2/13). But in the case of the reader, be sure that the author of your reference is clear. You could write, for example: *Adam Smith wrote that the quantity of a commodity brought to market “naturally suits itself to the effectual demand”* (120).
- In terms of length, three-quarters to one full page = the Goldilocks zone. A paragraph of ½ page or less will prejudice the reader against it.
- Be sure to give yourself time to write *and then revise* the paragraph.
- Avoid the passive voice, contractions, “would” as a weird form of past tense, the word “led” (which usually tells little), and anything else that I have identified as undesirable.