Active Voice vs. Passive Voice

What is Active Voice?
When you use “active voice,” the sentence’s subject (main noun) is doing the action of the sentence.

For example: *The clerk (subject) helped (action) the customer (object of the action).*

What is Passive Voice?
When you use “passive voice,” the sentence’s subject (main noun) is not stated; the action of the sentence occurs, but it’s not clear who or what is doing it.

For example: *The customer (object of the action) was helped (action).*

Who helped the customer? It is not clear because the sentence’s subject is not stated.

Should I use Active Voice or Passive Voice?
Academic readers generally prefer Active Voice because it is clearer and explains who or what did the action of the sentence. Active Voice is also considered a more confident style of writing.

Is Passive Voice okay to use sometimes?
Yes! There are some contexts that require Passive Voice. You should probably use Passive Voice when you need to:

- **Focus the reader’s attention on a process, instead of the person doing the process**
  - *Next, acid (object) was added (action, in passive voice) to the mixture.*
    - In this example, the process is important, but the person doing it is not. Thus, passive voice is a good choice.

- **Focus the reader’s attention on the object of the action, rather than the actor**
  - *The highway (object) will be finished (action, in passive voice) next month.*
    - The most important information is the object (the highway) and the action (finishing the highway), not whoever is finishing it. In fact, the reader can easily guess that “construction workers” is the subject.

- **Place pronouns or other information at the beginning of a sentence** in order to create a smoother transition between sentences and to avoid confusing the reader
  - *When writing a literary analysis, avoid making logical mistakes. They (object, also refers to logical mistakes) are used (action, in passive voice) by teachers to penalize students.*
    - In this instance, placing the pronoun “They” at the beginning of the sentence makes it easier to understand what it refers to (“logical mistakes”). Even though Passive Voice is used, the sentence is actually clearer than it would be if it were written in Active Voice.