Active vs. Passive Voice (“left” vs. “was leaving”)
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The verb form “was leaving” and the verb form “left” are both past tense, but the difference is that one is passive and one is active.

Active Voice
Active voice is used when a writer wants the sentence to have more emphasis on the verb action and does not want the subject of the action obscured. This is the preferred type of voice for most writers.

Jessica walked to the store and ran into Mike on the way there.
Here, the emphasis is on Jessica walking (active voice), more than on Mike interrupting her while she was walking.

The waitress gave Brian a soda at the restaurant.
In this sentence, the verb “gave” is used which necessitates a subject to do the giving. With this active voice the subject—the waitress—cannot be avoided.

Passive Voice
Passive voice is used when the emphasis is not on the action, but on some other part of the sentence. Passive voice can also be used when you want to use a verb that normally requires a specified subject, but you don’t want to explicitly name the subject.

Jessica was walking to the store when Mike ran into her.
Here, because of passive voice, the emphasis is on Mike running into Jessica, rather than the fact that she was walking.

Brian was given a soda at the restaurant.
Here, by using “was given” the subject—the person who gave Brian the soda—is obscured. Passive voice can be a way to avoid the subject, if necessary.