When is the Passive Often Used?

0-i Passive sentences are usually used WITHOUT the by-phrase.

0-ii The by-phrase is used only when it is important to know who/what does/did the action.

The passive is used:

1. When the agent, the person/people/thing(s) that does/do the action, is clear from the context, not known, or not important to know.

   Oranges are grown in California.
   (Usually farmers grow oranges. You don't need to know who grows them.)
   The Bible is read all over the world.
   (You don’t need to say who reads the bible. People read it.)

2. When the writer wants to make the receiver or the result of the action more important, than the action itself.

   Sixty people were killed by the earthquake.
   (The people are more important than the earthquake in this sentence.)

3. When the writer wants to make a statement sound objective (or scientific/academic). He/she can avoid mentioning who does this action particularly.

   It is believed that he will resign as President.
   (c.f. I believe that he will resign as President. / They believe that he will resign as President)
   It was believed that the earth was flat a long time ago.
   (c.f. People believed that the earth was flat a long time ago.)

4. When the writer doesn't want to upset someone by mentioning the agent (doer), or when he/she cannot/will not identify the agent.

   Margaret was given some bad advice about selecting courses.
   (c.f. Professor Smith gave some bad advice about selecting courses.)
   A lot of school windows were broken last night.
   (c.f. Tom and Brandon broke a lot of school windows last night.)