

THE PASSIVE VOICE

Voice refers to the form of a verb that indicates when a grammatical subject performs the action or is the receiver of the action.

When a sentence is written in the active voice, the subject performs the action; in the passive voice, the subject receives the action.

1. PASSIVE VOICE WITH THE AUXILIARY VERB “BE”

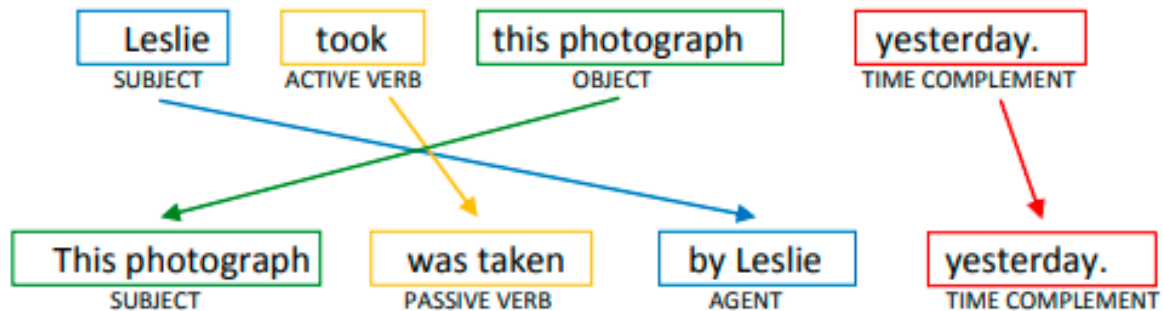
The passive voice is formed by using a form of the auxiliary verb “be” (at the required tense) followed by the past participle of the main verb.

S+ BE +Vb.3 (*by...*)
(at the required tense)

| TENSES | ACTIVE VOICE | PASSIVE VOICE |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Present Simple | He delivers the letters. | The letters are delivered. |
| Past Simple | He delivered the letters. | The letters were delivered. |
| Future Simple | He will deliver the letters. | The letters will be delivered. |
| Present Continuous | He is delivering the letters. | The letters are being delivered. |
| Past Continuous | He was delivering the letters. | The letters were being delivered. |
| Going to | He is going to deliver the letters. | The letters are going to be delivered. |
| Present Perfect | He has delivered the letters. | The letters have been delivered. |
| Past Perfect | He had delivered the letters. | The letters had been delivered. |
| Modals (present) | He must deliver the letters. | The letters must be delivered. |
| Modals (past) | He must have delivered the letters. | The letters must have been delivered. |

ACTIVE TO PASSIVE

Agatha Christie **wrote** this book. → This book **was written** by Agatha Christie.



USE

The Passive is used:

1. When the agent (=the person who does the action) is unknown, unimportant or obvious from the context.

Jane was shot. (We don't know who shot her.)

This church was built in 1815. (Unimportant agent)

He has been arrested. (Obviously, by the police)

2. To make more polite or formal statements.

The car hasn't been cleaned. (more polite) (You haven't cleaned the car. – less polite)

3. When the action is more important than the agent, as in processes, instructions, events, reports, headlines, new items, and advertisements.

30 people were killed in the earthquake.

4. To put emphasis on the agent.

The new library will be opened by the Queen.

WHEN TO USE PASSIVE VOICE

Although active voice is generally preferred in academic writing, passive voice is acceptable under certain conditions.

• **to emphasize the receiver of the action instead of the doer**

Quizzes are given regularly.

Grades for all students are averaged.

Questions are encouraged.

- **to keep the focus on the same subject through several sentences or paragraphs**

My sister and I grew up and went to school in Jamaica. We were educated according to the British system. In 1997 we were given the opportunity to come to the United States. We decided to finish high school before leaving our own country. We were concerned that the education in this country might not be as good as the one we had there, and we wanted to improve our English too.

- when we do not know who performed the action:

Ray's calculator was made in Germany.

The answers have been filled in.

- **when we do not wish to mention the doer of the action**

Many problems have been ignored for too long.

I was given some bad advice.

Note: This use often reveals an unwillingness to take responsibility (or place it on someone else). It is a sort of substitute:

“A mistake was made.” (“I made a mistake.”)

“Not enough has been done to end homelessness.” (“We have not done enough to end homelessness.”)

“You have been misinformed.” (“You are wrong.”)

- **when we want to sound objective or avoid using the subject “I”**

Studies have shown . . .

It is well-known . . .

Hamlet is considered . . .

It can be assumed . . .

It has been established . . .

AGENT

To say who did the action that we are talking about, ie. to refer to the agent, we use the preposition **by** and **the name** (*by Peter*), **noun** (*by the teacher*) or **pronoun** (*by him*) at the end of the sentence.

We usually only refer to the agent when it gives us some important information which otherwise would be missing from the sentence.

*Our house was designed **by a famous architect**.*

We don't mention the agent!!!

1. If we don't know who has done what we are talking about.

Our car was stolen last night. (We don't know who stole it)

2. If we are not interested in who has done what we are talking about or it is not important to mention it.

He has been taken to hospital. (What we are interested in is the fact that he has been taken to hospital and not who has taken him.)

3. If it is easy to understand who did something without being mentioned.

The murderer was arrested last night. (It is not necessary to mention that he has been arrested by the police because it is self-evident.)

4. If the subject of the active voice sentence is something like: somebody, people, they, you, etc.

Someone broke the window. → The window was broken.

~~Someone~~ trained my dog Charlie to protect the house.

- It is not important who trained Charlie
- It is obvious that it was "someone"
- We don't know who trained Charlie

This is the most important thing.
This is what I'm taking about.

My dog Charlie was trained to protect the house.

This is now the subject
of the sentence.

AGENT vs INSTRUMENT

When the agent is mentioned, it is usually preceded by the preposition **BY**:

*The bus had been driven **by** a young man.*

*Who was 'Ulysses' written **by**?*

We use the preposition **WITH** when we mention the instrument or material used.

It is also often used with the verbs: PACK, CRAM, FILL, CROWD, COVER:

*The child is covered **with** a blanket.*

*My living room is crammed **with** furniture.*

Sometimes both are possible:

*She was unexpectedly **struck by a falling branch** while walking down the street. (A falling branch hit her while she was walking down the street.)*

*She was unexpectedly **struck with a branch** while walking down the street. (Somebody hit her with a branch while she was walking down the street.)*

DOUBLE OBJECT VERBS

When we have verbs that take two objects (for example: **give somebody something**), we can convert the active sentence into a passive one in two ways:

a. By making the indirect (animate) object the subject of the passive voice sentence.

b. By making the direct (inanimate) object the subject of the passive voice.

Rick gave me (indirect object) this book (direct object).

I was given this book by Rick.

This book was given to me by Rick.

Here are some of the verbs that take two objects are: *give, tell, send, show, bring, write, offer, pay, etc.*

Note!!! When the indirect object is alone after the verb in the passive voice sentence, it needs the preposition **to**.

I gave **John** a book. → A book was given **TO** John.

- If the indirect object of the active voice sentence is a personal pronoun it has to be changed into a subject pronoun to be the subject of the passive voice sentence.

| SUBJECT | | OBJECT |
|---------|---|--------|
| I | ↔ | me |
| You | ↔ | you |
| He | ↔ | him |
| She | ↔ | her |
| It | ↔ | it |

| SUBJECT | | OBJECT |
|---------|---|--------|
| We | ↔ | us |
| You | ↔ | you |
| They | ↔ | them |

I gave **him** a book. **He** was given a book.

Get

Get can be used instead of **to be** in situations where something happens.

- Our flight got cancelled = Our flight was cancelled.

- I got paid today = I was paid today.

We use the **get passive** especially in informal speaking. When we use the get passive, we also place a little more emphasis on the nature of the action itself or on the person involved in the action:

There were blizzards over night and the whole town got snowed in. ('Get snowed in' here means to be unable to leave the town because of heavy falls of snow.)

I've got good news for you. Jim finally got promoted.

They had only known each other for six months when they got married in Las Vegas.

The **get passive** is commonly used in speaking of events that are negative or not desired:

They've worked there for three years but they still got sacked (lost their jobs).

He feels his paintings are always getting criticised.

Our car got stolen last night.

We sometimes use a reflexive pronoun with the **get passive**. This suggests the subject was at least partly responsible for the event or made it happen:

I got myself locked out the other day. I stupidly left my keys in the bedroom. (or I got locked out ...)

Tenses used in *BE* Passive Voice (all forms)

| | | SIMPLE | CONTINUOUS | PERFECT |
|-----------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| PRESENT | + | S + am/is/are + Ptp | S + am/is/are + being + Ptp | S + have/has + been + Ptp |
| | - | S + am/is/are + not + Ptp | S + am/is/are + not + being + Ptp | S + have/has + not + been + Ptp |
| | ? | Am/Is/Are + S + Ptp ? | Am/Is/Are) + S + being + Ptp ? | Have/Has) + S + been + Ptp ? |
| PAST | + | S + was/were + Ptp | S + was/were + being + Ptp | S + had + been + Ptp |
| | - | S + was/were + not + Ptp | S + was/were + not + being + Ptp | S + had + not + been + Ptp |
| | ? | Was/Were + S + PtpV ? | Was/Were + S + being + Ptp? | Had + S + been + Ptp |
| FUTURE | + | S + will + be + Ptp | | |
| | - | S + will + not + be + Ptp | | |
| | ? | Will + S + be + Ptp ? | | |
| GOING TO | + | S + V to be (am/is/are) + going to + be + Ptp | | |
| | - | S + V to be (am/is/are) + not + going to + be + Ptp | | |
| | ? | V to be (am/is/are) + S + going to + be + Ptp ? | | |

SPECIFIC PASSIVE FORMS

Impersonal Passive

We use reporting verbs such as: **consider, believe, think, say, claim, know, require, report, understand, expect** for passive generalisations:

a. Without a subject, we use: IT + BE + VERB (+ THAT)

It is believed that the number thirteen is unlucky in many western countries.

It is considered rude to arrive late to a wedding.

It is said that the old Manson house is haunted.

It is believed that he worked abroad years ago.

It was believed that he was working abroad. (sequence of past tenses)

b. With a subject, we use: SUBJECT + BE + VERB + INFINITIVE

The young scientist is thought to be very innovative.

He is considered to be the best person for the job.

Australian snakes are claimed to be the most poisonous in the world.

He is considered to have worked abroad in his youth.

He was considered to have worked abroad. (sequence of past tenses)

If the SECOND verb is in the PAST, we need a PERFECT INFINITIVE

(TO HAVE+ PAST PARTICIPLE/Vb3)

The police believe that the thieves BROKE the window to get into the house

→ *It is believed that the thieves broke the window to get into the house.*

→ *The thieves are believed to HAVE BROKEN the window to get into the house.*

Police have reported that Peter caused the accident.

→ *It has been reported that Peter caused the accident.*

→ *Peter has been reported to HAVE CAUSED the accident.*

If the second verb is in continuous form, we need a continuous infinitive

(BE + -ING)

They think he is having an affair.

→ *It's thought that he's having an affair*

→ *He is thought to be having an affair.*

Other examples

a. They say that he knows some very influential people.

a. It is said that he knows some very influential people. / He is said to know some very influential people.

b. People felt that the social workers were doing valuable work.

b. It was felt that the social workers were doing valuable work. / The social workers were felt to be doing valuable work.

c. Everyone thought that the government had shown scant regard for public opinion.

c. It was thought that the Government had shown scant regard for public opinion. / The Government was thought to have shown scant regard for public opinion.

Remember! We use **Past Infinitive (TO HAVE+Vb 3)** to express the idea of a past event or when we encounter *the sequence of past tenses*.

The passive participle

Authorities refused to reveal any information about the case **being investigated**.

(**passive present participle**)

Having been nominated three times for an Oscar, he is one of today's most acclaimed film directors. (**passive perfect participle**)

The passive simple gerund

She hates people laughing at her.

She hates **being laughed at**.

I don't like him staring at me.

I don't like **being stared at**.

I don't remember grannie taking me to the zoo.

I don't remember **being taken** to the zoo by grannie.

The man denied **having been accused of** murder.

NON-FINITE FORMS

| | Active | Passive |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Infinitive | to choose | to be chosen |
| Perfect infinitive | to have chosen | to have been chosen |
| Participle and gerund | choosing | being chosen |
| Perfect participle and gerund | having chosen | having been chosen |

Causative Passive: **HAVE/GET SOMETHING DONE**

Have + object + past participle (have something done)

Get + object + past participle (get something done)

'I painted my house last month' = (I did the work myself)

'I had/got my house painted last month' = (someone else did the work for me)

If you **'have something done'**, you get **somebody else to do something for you**.

- *I'm going to have my hair cut.*
- *She's having her house redecorated.*
- *She will have her car repaired.*

Get something done suggests more effort than **Have something done**.

"Get" is just **more informal** than **"Have"** in the causative form.

In informal English, we can replace 'have' by 'get'.

- *We're getting a new telephone system installed.*
- *They will be getting the system repaired as quickly as they can.*
- *I got the bill sent direct to the company.*

Get is also used to **express the necessity or the insistent advice**.

- *I think I must get these shoes mended.*
- *Get your shoes cleaned first!*

The causative passive refers to (an):

1. Intentional use

- *I'm going to have my hair cut.*

2. Unintentional use

Things happen to us but we do not want them to happen or ask for them to be done.

- The construction with **Have** suggests the subject was quite innocent, with **Get** suggests that the subject was partially responsible for what happened to him.

'I had my watch stolen last night' (I didn't have anything to do with that).

'I got my nose broken in a fight' (I was also fighting and doing harm).

Have someone do something (have + person + infinitive)

We can also use the construction '**subject + have + person + infinitive**'.

This has a very similar meaning to '*have something done*', but this time we say **who did the thing** - we talk about the person who we asked to do the thing for us.

- *I had the electrician look at my broken light.*
- *The doctor will have the nurse call the patients.*
- *The teacher had the students write the answers on the whiteboard.*

Get someone to do something (get + person + to + infinitive)

We can also use the construction '*get + someone + to + infinitive*'.

This means that you cause the other person to do the action, maybe by paying them to do it, or by asking them to do it, or by persuading them to do it.

- *She gets her son to do his homework by promising him ice cream when he's finished.*
- *I got the cleaner to clean under the cupboards.*

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVE, PASSIVE AND CAUSATIVE FORMATION

| Tense | Active the subjective + verb + the objective | Passive the objective + a form of "be" + III | Causative the subjective + a form of "have" + the objective + III |
|--------------|--|--|---|
| Pr S | I install the washing machine. | The washing machine is installed . | I have the washing machine installed . |
| Pr Cont | I am installing the washing machine. | The washing machine is being installed . | I am having the washing machine installed. |
| Pr Perf | I have installed the washing machine. | The washing machine has been installed . | I have had the washing machine installed . |
| Pr Perf Cont | I have been installing the washing machine | --- | --- |
| PS | I installed the washing machine. | The washing machine was installed | I had the washing machine installed . |
| P Cont | I was installing the washing machine. | The washing machine was being installed . | I was having the washing machine installed . |
| P Perf | I had installed the washing machine. | The washing machine had been installed . | I had had the washing machine installed . |
| P Perf Cont | I had been installing the washing machine. | --- | --- |
| FS | I will install the washing machine | The washing machine will be installed . | I will have the washing machine installed . |
| F Cont | I will be installing the washing machine. | --- | --- |
| F Perf | I will have installed the washing machine. | The washing machine will have been installed . | I will have had the washing machine installed . |
| F Perf Cont | I will have been installing the washing machine. | --- | --- |
| | I have to install the washing machine. | The washing machine has to be installed . | I have to have the washing machine installed . |
| | I should install the washing machine | The washing machine should be installed . | I should have the washing machine installed . |