

PASSIVE VOICE

to be + past participle

- **to be** is in the appropriate tense
- only transitive verbs (verbs which take an object) can be put into the passive
- Present Perfect Continuous, Future Continuous and Past Perfect Continuous are not normally used in the passive
- **Get** is used in colloquial English instead of **be** to express something happening by accident.
- the **object** of the active verb becomes the **subject** in the passive sentence
- the **active verb** changes into a **passive form**
- the **subject** of the active verb becomes the **agent** which is either introduced with **by** or is omitted

ACTIVE

PASSIVE

Present Simple : He gives lectures.

Lectures are given.

Present Contin-s : He is giving a lecture.

A lecture is being given.

Past Simple : He gave a lecture.

A lecture was given.

Past Continuous : He was giving a lecture.

A lecture was being given.

Future Simple : He will give a lecture.

A lecture will be given.

Present Perfect : He has given a lecture.

A lecture has been given.

Past Perfect : He had given a lecture.

A lecture had been given.

Future Perfect : He will have given a lecture.

A lecture will have been given.

modal : He must give a lecture.

A lecture must be given

Present Infinitive: He should give a lecture.

A lecture should be given.

Perfect Infinitive: He should have given a lecture. A lecture should have been given.

- ing form: She remembers him giving a lecture. She remembers a lecture being given.

Perfect -ing form: Having given the lecture,.....

The lecture having been given,.....

PASSIVE IS USED

1) when the person who performs the action (agent) is

- unknown
- unimportant
- obvious from the context

Her flat was broken into yesterday. (by a burglar — obvious agent)

2) to emphasise the agent

Her wedding dress was delivered to her by the dressmaker herself yesterday.

3) to make statements more formal or polite.

My dress has been ruined. (more polite than saying “You have ruined my dress.”)

4) when we are more interested in the action than the agent, such as in news reports, formal notices, instructions, processes, headlines, advertisements, etc.

The meeting will be held tomorrow.

4) if the subject of a verb is a long clause (the passive structure includes the agent)

Dr. McHugh was surprised by the objections to his presence at the meeting.

(More natural than The objections to his presence at the meeting surprised Dr. McHugh.)

CHANGING FROM ACTIVE INTO PASSIVE

- **by + agent** is used to say **who or what did** the action.

*She was knocked down **by** a car.*

- **with + instrument/ material** is used to say **what the agent used** or **after past participles** such as coloured, crammed, crowded, filled, flavoured, packed, etc.

*She was injured **with** a hammer.*

- **by + agent** is omitted when the agent is **unknown, unimportant, obvious** from the context or referred to by words such as: **someone, people, I**, etc.

They revealed the truth. —→ The truth was revealed. (by them is omitted)

- verbs which take **two objects** (give, offer, etc) form their passive in **two ways**; it is more usual to start the sentence with the animate (person) object, not the inanimate (thing) object.

*They offered Ann a bunch of flowers. —→ Ann was offered a bunch of flowers.
(more usual than: A bunch of flowers was offered to Ann.)*

CHANGING FROM ACTIVE INTO PASSIVE

- verbs followed by a preposition (accuse of, take down, etc) take the **preposition immediately after** them when turned into the passive.

She took down the minutes of the meeting. —→ The minutes of the meeting were taken down.

- in passive questions with **who, whom or which** we do not omit **by**.

Who gave you this information? —→ Who were you given this information by?

- **hear, help, make, see** are followed by a **to-infinitive** in the passive.

She made me work overtime. —→ I was made to work overtime.

- note that **hear, see, watch** can be followed by a present participle in the active and passive. *We saw her crying. —→ She was seen crying.*

- the verbs **believe, expect, feel, hope, know, report, say, think**, etc are used in the following passive patterns in personal and impersonal constructions

1. **active:** *The police report that she is in France.*

2. **subject (person) + passive verb + to -inf (personal construction)** *She is reported to be in France.*

3. **it + passive verb + that-clause (impersonal construction)** *It is reported that she is in France.*

PREPOSITIONAL VERBS IN PASSIVE

- Verbs followed by a preposition in passive structures take the preposition **immediately after them.**

*The patient was **operated on** yesterday.*

*Every detail will be **looked into**.*

*This book is being much **talked about**.*

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|--------------|--------------|------------------------|
| • approve of | • comment on | • discriminate against |
| • listen to | • look at | • look into |
| • mock at | • rely on | • talk about |
| • call in | • deal with | • laugh at |
| • look after | • look for | • look upon |
| • operate on | • shout at | • think of |

VERBS WITH TWO OBJECTS THAT CAN BE USED IN TWO PASSIVE STRUCTURES

- Verbs which take **two** objects, direct and indirect, can be used in **two passive structures**

*Active: His brother has given **him** (1) **money** (2) to help him get married.*

(1) is an indirect object; (2) is a direct object

*Passive: (1) **He** has been given money to help him get married.*

*(2) **Money** has been given to him to help him get married.*

- The first passive structure is more common.
- In the second passive structure, the preposition “to” is often used before the indirect object.

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|-----------|---------|----------|
| • ask | • show | • offer |
| • lend | • teach | • refuse |
| • promise | • tell | • grant |
| • give | • send | • pay |

VERBS WITH TWO OBJECTS THAT CAN BE USED IN ONE PASSIVE STRUCTURE

- Verbs which take two objects, **direct and prepositional**, can only be used in **one passive structure**

Active: The teacher explained the rule (1) to the students (2).

(1) is a direct object; (2) is a prepositional object

Passive: (1) The rule was explained to the students.

(2) Impossible!

- announce
- dictate
- mention
- propose
- repeat

- describe
- explain
- point out
- recommend
- suggest