

THE PASSIVE VOICE

A sentence in the active voice:

The thieves robbed the bank's vault.

↑ ↑
subject object

When a sentence is in the active voice, the subject performs the action, and the object has the action done to it.

A sentence in the passive voice:

eg. 1

The bank vault was robbed by the thieves.

↑ subject ↑ Who did this to the subject?

In the passive voice, the subject is “passive”! That means it doesn’t perform an action. Instead, the subject has the action done to it.

eg. 2

The bank vault was robbed.
↑
subject

Sometimes, *who or what* performed the action to the subject is in the predicate. This “agent” follows the verb and the word *by* (eg.1). However, this information is not always there. (eg.2)

What about the verb?

The verb in the passive voice is formed by the verb to be (properly conjugated) + the past participle of the verb.

No words were spoken at the meeting.

The spaceship will be designed by engineers.

The dogs were taken for a walk.

That book was written by John Green.

The locks are checked every day.

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Example

Peninsula Bank **was founded** in 1924. It has a reputation of being the most secure bank in New York City, but last night, it **was robbed**. Fifty million dollars **were emptied** from the vault at the bank's headquarters. The thieves **have not been caught**, and there's an investigation presently **being undertaken**.

Sadly, the windows of the historical building **were broken** during the robbery, and the bank will remain closed until further notice. If you witnessed the robbery, or have information relevant to the investigation, contact the Police Department as soon as possible. Any detail, no matter how small, **will be appreciated**.

Questions:

When was the bank robbed?

- a) *It's undefined.*
- b) *Yesterday night.*
- c) *Today, early in the morning.*

What was the reputation of Peninsula bank like before it was robbed?

- a) *It was considered as secure as all other banks.*
- b) *It was considered more secure than other banks.*
- c) *It was considered insecure, and had been robbed before.*

Who is undertaking the investigation?

- a) *The Police Department.*
- b) *Detective Jones.*
- c) *The owner of the bank.*

When will the bank reopen?

- a) *When the windows are fixed.*
- b) *It's undefined*
- c) *When the investigation finalizes.*

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Exercise:

Turn the passive sentences into active sentences:

Pietra was fired by her boss.

*Pietra's boss fired her.*_____

Those skyscrapers were built by The Happy Building Company.

The students at School of Heroes are taught to fly by the flying instructor.

The kids were caught fooling around in the playground by the teacher.

Turn the active sentences into passive sentences:

The thieves have stolen the money.

*The money has been stolen by the thieves*_____

Leonardo Da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa

Charles Darwin wrote The Origin Of Species.

The mechanic will fix the squeaky elevator.

The people are abandoning the ship.
