

15 The passive

Forms, uses, and contexts

- 1 Some examples of passive sentences:
English is spoken all over the world.
This product was invented in Sweden.

- 2 We use this pattern to form the passive:

subject + be + past participle

(For details on forming past participles, see p. 14.)

- 3 The form of be is different for different verb tenses:

PRESENT SIMPLE PASSIVE

subject + am/is/are + past participle

I'm employed by a big company.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS PASSIVE

subject + am/is/are + being + past participle

The road is being repaired.

PAST SIMPLE PASSIVE

subject + was/were + past participle

It was made in China.

PAST CONTINUOUS PASSIVE

subject + was/were + being + past participle

People were being interviewed.

PRESENT PERFECT PASSIVE

subject + has/have + been + past participle

He has been given a new job.

MODAL PASSIVE

subject + modal + be + past participle

Applications must be received before 12 May.

GOING TO PASSIVE

subject + am/is/are going to + be + past participle

I'm not going to be chosen for the team.

Grammar in action

- 1 We use the passive when the person who 'does' the verb is not important or we don't know who 'does' the verb. The object of the verb is more important, so it becomes the subject of the sentence and we use a passive verb:

The college was built in 1947.

(= Some people built the college in 1947.)



Here, *the college* is the subject of the sentence because the man is talking about the college. He is not talking about who built the college, and he may not know who built it. He uses a passive verb because *the college* is not the subject of the verb (the college did not build anything).

- 2 We often use the passive in formal contexts, such as public information (rules, signs, brochures, etc.) and media reports:

Cycling is not permitted in this area. (Cycling is the subject of the rule, not who does not allow it.)

Bookings can be made online. (Bookings is the subject of the sentence, not the people making them.)

A A bad journey



Complete this story about a journey, using the past simple passive or past continuous passive form of the verbs in brackets. You will need to use one past continuous passive form and one negative form.

The journey to Italy was terrible. First of all, I got to the airport quite late. I

..... ⁰ (drive) there in a taxi, but my taxi got stuck in traffic because the

road ¹ (repair). When I got to the airport, I ²

(tell) that there was a problem and the flight ³ (delay). Then I

..... ⁴ (put) in a seat on the plane next to some very loud children. During

the flight, we ⁵ (give) a really horrible meal. When we landed, my bags

..... ⁶ (search) and this took a long time. Everything ⁷

(take out) of them. When I came out of the airport, I was too late for the bus to my hotel. I

had to get a taxi and I ⁸ (charge) a lot of money for the journey. When

I finally got to the hotel, all the staff were busy. I ⁹ (show) to my room

and I had to find it myself. It was a terrible way to start the trip.

B Tonight's news

Complete these news stories, using the passive form of the correct verbs in the box. In each paragraph, use the same verb tense as the example.

leave create announce complete
build choose show name

New bridge planned for north

A new bridge is going to be built⁰ in the north of the country next year. The plan¹ to the public in June and the work² within three years. Thousands of new jobs³ in that part of the country.

World Cup shock

The national team for the World Cup has been announced⁰ and it contains some surprises. Several new players⁴ for the squad for the first time, a new captain⁵ and a number of established players⁶ out.

C Ordering online

Complete the information and instructions from a company's website, using the verbs in brackets and the passive forms given after each sentence.

- 0 All our products can be ordered (order) online. (can)
- 1 Orders (make) 24 hours a day. (can)
- 2 All major credit cards (accept). (present simple)
- 3 Orders (deliver) within 14 days. (will)
- 4 A delivery address (provide). (must)
- 5 Please wait. Your order (process). (present continuous)
- 6 Your order (send). (present perfect)

D Harry's party

Complete this conversation between two friends, using the words below it and the correct passive forms.

- ADAM Where was this photograph taken⁰? And¹?
- IAN At Harry's party last week.
- ADAM Oh,² to that.
- IAN No, I know.³ far in advance and⁴ about it.
- ADAM Was it a good party?⁵?
- IAN Only about 20 people came. But it was good fun.
- ADAM What exactly is happening in this photograph?
- IAN⁶ in water and his friends are laughing.
- ADAM Well,⁷ if someone did that to me. But Harry deserves it!

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 0 Where/this photograph/take | 4 lots of people/not/tell |
| 1 when/it/take | 5 How many people/invite |
| 2 I/not/invite | 6 Harry/cover |
| 3 The party/not/plan | 7 I/not/would/amuse |

15 The passive

Active and passive compared

4 Here is a comparison between active and passive forms:

PRESENT SIMPLE

ACTIVE The price **includes** meals.

PASSIVE Meals **are included** in the price.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

ACTIVE Police **are interviewing** a man.

PASSIVE A man **is being interviewed** by police.

PAST SIMPLE

ACTIVE He **caused** the problem.

PASSIVE The problem **was caused** by him.

PAST CONTINUOUS

ACTIVE People **were repairing** the road.

PASSIVE The road **was being repaired**.

PRESENT PERFECT

ACTIVE They **have sold** all the tickets.

PASSIVE All the tickets **have been sold**.

MODAL

ACTIVE You **can buy** this book in most bookshops.

PASSIVE This book **can be bought** in most bookshops.

GOING TO

ACTIVE The manager **is going to choose** the team tomorrow.

PASSIVE The team **is going to be chosen** tomorrow.

5 We often use **by** after a passive verb form to say who or what is the subject of the verb. We use **by** before the 'agent' (the person or thing that 'does' the action):

The programme is watched by millions of people.

(= Millions of people watch the programme.)

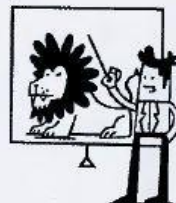
Children must be accompanied by an adult.

(= An adult must accompany children.)

Grammar in action

3 We use the **active** or the **passive** depending on what is the main topic we are talking about or what we are most interested in. We use the **active** if the subject of the verb is the main topic, and the **passive** if the subject of the sentence is not the subject of the verb because the subject of the verb is not important or not known:

Lions live in parts of Africa and southern Asia. They belong to the cat family. Lions are hunted and killed in some places. They can be seen in many zoos.



Here, the topic is 'lions'. 'Lions' is the subject of 'live' and 'belong', and so those verbs are active. 'Lions' is not the subject of 'hunted', 'killed' or 'seen' – other people hunt, kill and see lions – and so those verbs are passive.

4 We use **by** + agent after a passive verb when it is important to say who 'does' the verb because the sentence would have no real meaning without this information:

The painting 'Sunflowers' was painted by Vincent Van Gogh. It is a very famous painting.

In the example, the main topic is the painting – it is the subject of the next sentence. But the artist's name is important information. We use **by** + agent because the sentence is about both the painting and the artist, and the artist (the agent) is not the subject of the verb.

E College information

Complete the information from a college brochure by changing the active sentences into passive sentences.

- 0 We offer excellent tuition at the college.
- 1 You can find details of all our courses on our website.
- 2 We do not give lessons on public holidays.
- 3 You must pay all course fees in advance.
- 4 We are introducing new courses at the college.
- 5 Students take tests at the end of every course.

Excellent tuition is offered... at the college.

..... on our website.

..... on public holidays.

..... in advance.

..... at the college.

..... at the end of every course.

F Short story competition

This is an announcement on a children's TV programme about a competition. Rewrite the announcement, changing the active forms into passive forms with *by*.

As you know, this programme runs a short story competition every year, and every year, children from all over the country send in stories for the competition. And I know that many of you are creating fantastic stories right now. Last year a story called 'Creeps' won the competition and Ellie Stone, aged 12, wrote that story. The teenage magazine YLP published it and many thousands of people all over the country read it. This year the film director Marvin White is going to judge the competition. And this year, a film studio in London is offering the top prize – Marvin will make the winning story into a short film after the competition. This channel will show that film later in the year.

As you know, a short story competition is run by this programme⁰ every year, and every year¹ from all over the country for the competition. And I know that² right now. Last year³ called 'Creeps' and⁴, aged 12.⁵ YLP and⁶ all over the country. This year,⁷ Marvin White. And this year,⁸ in London –⁹ after the competition.¹⁰ later in the year.



G Crime report

Complete this conversation in a police station by putting in the correct active and passive verbs in the box.

will be seen ran will be found will help appeared was grabbed
will throw will be written took has happened contained
was being served will be asked might remember wasn't seen
has been stolen am being robbed will be returned

- WOMAN Can you help me? My bag has been stolen⁰. Someone¹ it while I was in a shop. I² by an assistant and suddenly it³ by someone. I shouted 'I⁴ but it was too late.
- OFFICER OK. Can you wait here? In a few minutes you⁵ by one of my colleagues. You⁶ to give a description of this person and a report⁷.
- WOMAN I don't know what he looked like and the incident⁸ by anyone else. The thief simply⁹ and then he¹⁰ away.
- OFFICER OK. My colleague¹¹ you and you¹² more than you think.
- WOMAN I hope so. It's very important. My bag¹³ my passport but no money. Perhaps the thief¹⁴ it away and it¹⁵ by somebody.
- OFFICER Yes, it's possible that it¹⁶ to you by a member of the public. That kind of thing¹⁷ before.

Which of these words from exercise G describes a person, which one describes an action and which one describes an event? Write person, action or event.

A incident

B grab

C thief

WORD
FOCUS

OVER TO YOU Now go to page 124.