

# Passive 1



## Passive: form

Form the passive with *be* and a past participle. Compare the active and passive forms in these examples:

- Present simple      *The Government **builds** hundreds of houses every year.*  
*Hundreds of houses **are built** every year.*
- Present continuous    *The authorities **are questioning** two men.*  
*Two men **are being questioned** by the authorities.*
- Present perfect      *We **have chosen** Helen as the new president.*  
*Helen **has been chosen** as the new president.*
- Past simple          *The police **arrested** one protester.*  
*One protester **was arrested**.*
- Will                   *They **will play** the match on Wednesday evening.*  
*The match **will be played** on Wednesday evening.*
- The object in the active form (*hundreds of houses*, *two men*, *Helen*) moves to the front in the passive sentence and becomes the subject.

## Passive: use

- Focus on important information

Compare:

(active)	<i>The Government <b>built</b> hundreds of houses last year.</i>
(passive)	<i>Hundreds of houses <b>were built</b> by the Government last year.</i>

Active sentence: more emphasis on who did the action – *the Government*.

Passive sentence: more emphasis on the thing affected by the action – *the number of houses*.

Emphasized information usually comes at the beginning of the sentence.

- Spoken and written

The passive is used a lot in formal writing, especially scientific writing. It is common in speech and writing in general.

## Using *by* and *with*

- The 'agent' is the person or thing that does the action. We use *by* + agent.  
*Hundreds of houses were built last year.*  
*Hundreds of houses were built by the Government last year.*  
*A lot of stones were thrown.*  
*A lot of stones were thrown by angry football fans.*
- The 'instrument' is the thing used to perform the action. We use *with* + instrument.  
*The windows were broken with a baseball bat.*

## Sentences without an agent

It is not always necessary to mention the agent. There are several reasons for this:

- Agent not known: *Brenda's motorbike was stolen last night.*  
 We do not know who stole the motorbike.
- Agent obvious: *One protester was arrested.*  
 We know that it is always the police who arrest people. However, we can add these words if we want to.
- Agent unimportant: *A lot of small cars are sold every year.*  
 Who sells the cars is not important. If it was important, we could use *by* and the names of the people or companies who sell the cars.

## Transitive and intransitive verbs

- Verbs with objects are called transitive verbs (example: *help*). In this sentence, 'the old lady' is the object.  
*A young man helped the old lady across the road.*
- Verbs without objects are called intransitive verbs (example: *sit*).  
*Diane sits near the front of the class.*
- Dictionaries show this information with *T* or *I*. Only transitive verbs can be made passive.  
*The old lady was helped across the road by a young man.*
- Some verbs can have both transitive and intransitive meanings.  
*Diane walks to school.* (walk - intransitive)  
*When she gets home, she walks the dog.* (walk = 'take for a walk' – transitive)

## INTERMEDIATE LANGUAGE PRACTICE

**1 Underline the phrases which are not necessary in these sentences. Sometimes every phrase is necessary.**

- 1 My wallet has been stolen by someone.
- 2 We were taught by a different teacher yesterday.
- 3 Nick was operated on at the hospital by a doctor.
- 4 The meal was served by a waiter in a red coat.
- 5 We were shown round the museum by a guide.
- 6 Two letters were delivered this morning by the postman.
- 7 Three men have been arrested by the police.
- 8 Yesterday a window was broken by someone.

**2 Complete each sentence with a passive verb.**

- 1 The police questioned George.  
George .....was questioned..... by the police.
- 2 Millions of people watch this programme.  
This programme ..... by millions of people.
- 3 They will finish our new house at the end of the month.  
Our new house ..... at the end of the month.
- 4 They've elected a new president.  
A new president .....
- 5 They're rebuilding the damaged stadium.  
The damaged stadium .....
- 6 They've closed the mountain road.  
The mountain road .....
- 7 Students write most of this magazine.  
Most of this magazine ..... by students.
- 8 A burglar stole my laptop.  
My laptop ..... by a burglar.
- 9 Somebody will meet you at the bus station.  
You ..... at the bus station.
- 10 The girls' team won the cup last year.  
Last year the cup ..... by the girls' team.

**3** Underline the errors in these sentences. Rewrite each sentence.

1 Many pet dogs are losing every year.

.....Many pet dogs are lost every year......

2 The injured man was been taken to hospital.

.....

3 A new bridge is be built across the river.

.....

4 All the food at the party was ate.

.....

5 Nothing will being decided before next Saturday.

.....

6 The match is playing on Friday evening.

.....

7 The robber unlocked the door by a false key.

.....

8 This book was writing by Sam's father.

.....

**4** For every question, complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first, using no more than three words.

1 Archaeologists have discovered a new tomb in Egypt.

A new tomb .....has been discovered..... by archaeologists in Egypt.

2 The President will open the new sports stadium on Saturday.

The new sports stadium ..... by the President on Saturday.

3 Picasso painted this portrait.

This portrait ..... Picasso.

4 They will announce the results of the competition tomorrow.

The results of the competition ..... tomorrow.

5 They're redecorating our school during the summer holidays.

Our school ..... during the summer holidays.

6 The police in New York have arrested three terrorists.

Three terrorists ..... in New York.

7 Our company sells more than 1,000 cars every week.

More than 1,000 cars ..... our company every week.

8 They're building a new museum in the city centre.

A new museum ..... in the city centre.

## INTERMEDIATE LANGUAGE PRACTICE

**5 Rewrite each sentence so that it contains a passive verb, and so that the names of people are not mentioned.**

1 The authorities have closed the casino.

.....*The casino has been closed.*.....

2 The clubs have postponed the match.

.....*People all over the world speak English.*.....

4 The authorities have opened the new swimming pool.

.....*Someone left this purse in the classroom yesterday.*.....

6 The city council has banned traffic from the city centre.

.....*People have elected a new government.*.....

8 Someone broke into the flat last night.

.....*.....*.....

**6 Rewrite the sentences so that they contain a passive verb, where possible. Some sentences cannot be rewritten in this way.**

1 Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928.

.....*Penicillin was discovered in 1928 by Fleming.*.....

2 Everyone in the class arrived on time yesterday.

.....*not possible*.....

3 A helicopter rescued the six survivors from the water.

.....*.....*.....

4 The president congratulated the winner of the race.

.....*.....*.....

5 Two prisoners escaped from the jail yesterday evening.

.....*.....*.....

6 A policewoman found the two missing children in a local park.

.....*.....*.....

7 They will publish her new book next year.

.....*.....*.....

8 Suddenly a strange red light appeared in the sky.

.....*.....*.....