IMPROVEMENT PLAN GRADE: ELEVENTH

Passive Voice

What is the passive voice?

In general we tend to use the active voice. That is when a subject does an action to an object.

Somebody stole my laptop. (subject = Somebody / action(verb) = stole / object = my laptop)

The passive voice is used when we want to emphasize the action (the verb) and the object of a sentence rather than subject. This means that the subject is either less important than the action itself or that we don't know who or what the subject is.

My laptop **was stolen**. (The object – now the subject = My laptop / action= was stolen)

EXAMPLES:

1. Passive: Napa Valley is known for its excellent wines.

1. Active: [Many people] know Napa Valley for its excellent wines.

2. Passive: Twenty civilians were killed in the bomb explosion.

2. Active: Someone killed twenty civilians in the bomb explosion.

The passive agent

When we know who the subject is, we put it at the end with by. We call this an agent.

1. Passive: The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo Da Vinci. (agent =Leonardo Da Vinci)

2. Active: Leonardo Da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa.

Most writing instructors and editors recommend against using the passive voice, when possible. The reason for this is that when you use the active voice, your writing is clearer and less complicated.

1. Active: While Mr. Taylor was driving down Highway 101, a police officer pulled him over and gave him a speeding ticket.

2. Passive: While Mr. Taylor was driving down Highway 101, he was pulled over and given a ticket by a police officer.

If it's a long sentence and you know who the subject is, it's best to use the active voice.

The passive is often used to report something or to state a fact.

1. Highway 15 was closed yesterday due to a serious road accident.

2. A lot of corn is grown in Iowa.

Forming the passive voice

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The passive voice is not a tense in English. Each tense has its own passive voice which is created by using a form of the auxiliary verb to be + V3 (past participle)

The passive voice in each tense:

Tense Auxiliary verb + sample V3 (past participle) Examples

Present simple am, is, are + made Wine is made from grapes.

Many cars are made in Japan.

Present progressive am, is, are + being + sent The document is being sent right now.

I am being sent to work in the London office.

Past simple was, were + invited John was invited to speak at the conference.

We were invited to Daniel and Mary's wedding.

Past progressive was, were + being + washed The dog was being washed when I got home.

Their cars were being washed while they were in the mall shopping.

Future (will) will be + signed The contract will be signed tomorrow.

The documents will all be signed by next week.

Future (going to) am, is, are + going to be + built A bridge is going to be built within the next two years.

New houses are going to be built in our neighborhood.

Present perfect has, have + been + sold That start-up has been sold for $5 million.

The rights to his book have been sold for $250,000.

Past perfect had + been + hired The new manager had been hired before John left the company.

All the employees had hired before the store opened.

Future perfectwill + have been + finished The car will have been loaded by the time he gets home.

The crates will have been loaded by then.

Modals: can/could can, could + be + issued A passport can only be issued at the embassy.

He said the documents could be issued within the week.

Modal: have to have to, has to, had to + be + arranged A babysitter has to be arranged for this evening.

Joan's travel plans have to be arranged by December.

Modal: must must + be + stopped Criminals must be stopped before they commit crimes.

All of the rules for passive negatives and questions are the same as for the active voice.

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Note: Verbs that have no object (no one to "receive" the action) cannot be put into the passive, such as, arrive, come, die, exist, go, happen, have, live, occur sleep, etc.

Passive Voice – Exercises

FIRST EXERCISE

Fill in the correct passive form of the verb in parentheses.

1. After the earthquake, aid was sent to the people of Haiti. (sent)
2. The electricity was cut off because the bill hadn't been paid. (not pay)

1. Penicillin _____ by Alexander Fleming in 1928. (discover)

2. Statements _____ from all the witnesses at this moment. (take)

3. Whales _____ by an international ban on whaling. (must protect)
4. Both weddings _____ by Good Taste. (cater)
5. A Picasso _____ from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.(steal)
6. _____ this washing machine _____in Germany? (make)
7. Tea _____ in China. (grow)
8. When we reached the airport, we found that all the flights_____ due to the storm. (cancel)
9. The fax _____ until tomorrow morning. (not send)
10. The soundtrack of a movie _____ always _____ after the filming is finished. (is/add)

SECOND EXERCISE

Rewrite the sentences in passive voice.

1. John collects money. - _____
2. Anna opened the window. - _____
3. We have done our homework. - _____
4. I will ask a question. - _____
5. He can cut out the picture. - _____
6. The sheep ate a lot. - _____
7. We do not clean our rooms. - _____
8. William will not repair the car. - _____
9. Did Sue draw this circle? - _____
10. Could you feed the dog? - _____

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