

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) ***The Government** built hundreds of houses last year.*

(passive) ***Hundreds of houses** were built by the Government last year.*

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:

- 1 Agent not known: *Brenda's motorbike **was stolen** last night.*
 We do not know who stole the motorbike.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
Georgewas 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.

3 People all over the world speak English.

4 The authorities have opened the new swimming pool.

5 Someone left this purse in the classroom yesterday.

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

7 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.