



grammar: passive
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Passive Voice

The passive of an active tense is formed by putting the verb to be into the same tense as the active verb and adding the past participle of the active verb. The subject of the active verb becomes the 'agent' of the passive verb. The agent is very often not mentioned. When it is mentioned it is preceded by *by* and placed at the end of the clause..

- What is the difference between active and passive voice?

In **active voice**, the subject does the acting:

The committee made the decision.

In **passive voice**, the subject is acted upon:

The decision was made (by the committee).

	active voice	passive voice
Present Simple	He delivers the letters.	The letters are delivered .
Past Simple	He delivered the letters.	The letters were delivered .
Future Simple	He will deliver the letters.	The letters will be delivered .
Present Continuous	He is delivering the letters.	The letters are being delivered .
Past Continuous	He was delivering the letters.	The letters were being delivered .
Going to	He is going to deliver the letters.	The letters are going to be delivered .
Present Perfect	He has delivered the letters.	The letters have been delivered .
Past Perfect	He had delivered the letters.	The letters had been delivered .
Infinitive	He has to deliver the letters.	The letters have to be delivered .
Modals	He must deliver the letters.	The letters must be delivered .

Subject becomes object:

SUBJECT		OBJECT
I	↔	me
You	↔	you
He	↔	him
She	↔	her
It	↔	it
You	↔	you
We	↔	us
They	↔	them

- USE

The Passive is used:

1. when the agent (=the person who does the action) is unknown, unimportant or obvious from the context.

Jane was shot. (We don't know who shot her.)
This church was built in 1815. (Unimportant agent)
He has been arrested. (Obviously by the police)

2. to make more polite or formal statements.

The car hasn't been cleaned. (more polite)
(You haven't cleaned the car. – less polite)

3. when the action is more important than the agent, as in processes, instructions, events, reports, headlines, new items, and advertisements.

30 people were killed in the earthquake.

4. to put emphasis on the agent.

The new library will be opened by the Queen.

- Agent

To say who did the action that we are talking about, ie. to refer to the agent, we use the preposition by and the name (by Peter) , noun (by the teacher) or pronoun (by him) at the end of the sentence. We usually only refer to the agent when it gives us some important information which otherwise would be missing from the sentence.

Our house was designed by a famous architect.

- We don't mention the agent:

1. if we don't know who has done what we are talking about.

Our car was stolen last night. (We don't know who stole it)

2. if we are not interested in who has done what we are talking about or it is not important to mention it.

He has been taken to hospital. (What we are interested in is the fact that he has been taken to hospital and not who has taken him.)

3. if it is easy to understand who did something without it being mentioned.

The murderer was arrested last night. (It is not necessary to mention that he has been arrested by the police because it is self-evident.)

4. if the subject of the active voice sentence is something like somebody, people, they, you, etc.

Someone broke the window. → *The window was broken.*

- Active to passive

To change a sentence from the active voice to the passive voice:

- the object of the active voice sentence becomes the subject of the passive voice sentence.

Agatha Christie wrote this book.

This book was written by Agatha Christie.

- we change the main verb of the active voice sentence into the passive voice. The tense remains unchanged.
- the subject of the active voice sentence becomes the agent of the passive sentence. It is placed after the past participle and it is preceded by the preposition by.

EXERCISES

Rewrite these sentences in the passive voice.

1. They sell oysters in the shop next door.

2. They haven't delivered the food yet.

3. Shakespeare wrote King Lear.

4. They have to answer the questions on this sheet.

5. Has anybody put the cases upstairs?

6. Someone should take this rubbish away.

7. They'll ask you a lot of questions.

8. Someone's going to send her some flowers.

9. They didn't pay me much for that job.

10. Have they offered him a better job?

11. They told us a secret.

12. Would they lend me their car?

13. People should send their complaints to the head office.

14. They had to postpone the meeting because of illness.

15. They are going to hold next year's congress in San Francisco.

16. The bill includes service.

17. People don't use this road very often.

18. They cancelled all the flights because of fog.

19. Somebody accused me of stealing the money.

20. They are building a new ring-road round the city.

21. I didn't realize that someone was recording our conversation.

22. They have changed the date of the meeting.

23. Brian told me that somebody had attacked and robbed him in the street.

24. You should open the wine about three hours before you use it.

25. Somebody had cleaned my shoes and brushed my suit.

26. We use this room only on special occasions.

27. In some districts farmers use pigs to find truffles.

28. John gave Elizabeth that beautiful ring.

29. They have offered Sarah a very good job.

30. The estate agent showed the house to the young people.

31. We will pay the gardener a lot of money.

32. Someone is going to repair the roof next week.

33. They can't find Joanna.

34. They should decorate the room with flowers.

35. Archaeologists have discovered an ancient temple.

36. We will put all these things into boxes.

37. The firefighters rescued the teenagers from the burning building.

38. The youngest student in the class has written the best composition.

39. The children send me messages every day.

40. The villagers gave the travellers food and water.

41. A very talented young girl wrote the story.

42. They are going to finish the new road in a few days.

43. They cancelled the match because of the rain.

44. You must not cross this line.

45. They had picked the oranges before the storm.

46. Professor Smith should write the book.

47. Mr Elliot will pay the workers.

48. Two men were following Tom.

49. Millions of people use the Internet every day.

50. They gave Bob a CD player for his birthday.
