

# THE PASSIVE VOICE

## INTRODUCTION

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.

*Active: My grandfather planted this tree.*

*Passive: This tree was planted by my grandfather.*

## PASSIVE VERB TENSES

	ACTIVE VOICE	PASSIVE VOICE
Present Simple	<i>He <b>delivers</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>are delivered</b>.</i>
Past Simple	<i>He <b>delivered</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>were delivered</b>.</i>
Future Simple	<i>He <b>will deliver</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>will be delivered</b>.</i>
Present Continuous	<i>He <b>is delivering</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>are being delivered</b>.</i>
Past Continuous	<i>He <b>was delivering</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>were being delivered</b>.</i>
Going to	<i>He <b>is going to deliver</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>are going to be delivered</b>.</i>
Present Perfect	<i>He <b>has delivered</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>have been delivered</b>.</i>
Past Perfect	<i>He <b>had delivered</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>had been delivered</b>.</i>
Infinitive	<i>He <b>has to deliver</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>have to be delivered</b>.</i>
Modals	<i>He <b>must deliver</b> the letters.</i>	<i>The letters <b>must be delivered</b>.</i>

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		SIMPLE	CONTINUOUS	PERFECT
PRESENT	+	S + am/is/are + Ptp	S + am/is/are + being + Ptp	S + have/has + been + Ptp
	-	S + am/is/are + not + Ptp	S + am/is/are + not + being + Ptp	S + have/has + not + been + Ptp
	?	Am/Is/Are + S + Ptp ?	Am/Is/Are) + S + being + Ptp ?	Have/Has) + S + been + Ptp ?
PAST	+	S + was/were + Ptp	S + was/were + being + Ptp	S + had + been + Ptp
	-	S + was/were + not + Ptp	S + was/were + not + being + Ptp	S + had + not + been + Ptp
	?	Was/Were + S + PtpV ?	Was/Were + S + being + Ptp?	Had + S + been + Ptp
FUTURE	+	S + will + be + Ptp		
	-	S + will + not + be + Ptp		
	?	Will + S + be + Ptp ?		
GOING TO	+	S + V to be (am/is/are) + going to + be + Ptp		
	-	S + V to be (am/is/are) + not + going to + be + Ptp		
	?	V to be (am/is/are) + S + going to + be + Ptp ?		

## Short answers

To make short answers:

- we use the verb **to be** (am/is/are/was/were) for *Present Simple*, *Past Simple*, *Present Continuous*, *Past Continuous* and *Going To* questions.
- we use the verb **have** (have/has/had) for *Present Perfect* and *Past Perfect* questions.
- we use **will** for *Future Simple* questions.

## 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:

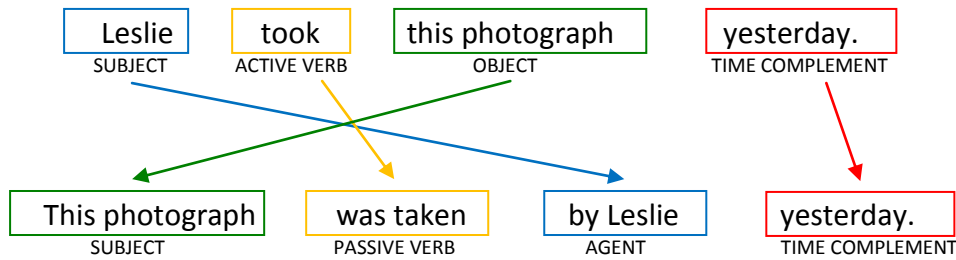
- the **object** of the active voice sentence becomes the **subject** of the passive voice sentence.

*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**.

*Agatha Christie wrote this book.*  
*This book was written by Agatha Christie.*



**BY OR WITH?**

In the passive voice, we use:

- **by** with the **agent** to refer to by whom the action is being done.  
*The door was opened by Mr Black. (Mr Black = agent)*
- **with** to refer to the instrument, object or material that was used for something to be done.  
*The door was opened with a key. (a key = the object that was used)*  
*The omelette was made with eggs, cheese and peppers. (eggs, cheese and peppers = the material that was used)*

**DOUBLE OBJECT VERBS**

When we have verbs that take two objects like, for example, **give somebody something**, we can convert the active sentence into a passive one in two ways:

- by making the **indirect** (animate) **object** the subject of the passive voice sentence, which is also the way that we usually prefer.  
*Rick gave me (indirect object) this book (direct object).*  
*I was given this book by Rick.*  
*This book was given to me by Rick.*

Some of the verbs that take two objects are: **give, tell, send, show, bring, write, offer, pay**, etc.

When the indirect object is alone after the verb in the passive voice sentence, it needs the preposition **to**. If the indirect object of the active voice sentence is a personal pronoun it has to be changed into a subject pronoun to be the subject of the passive voice sentence.

SUBJECT		OBJECT
I	↔	me
You	↔	you
He	↔	him
She	↔	her
It	↔	it

SUBJECT		OBJECT
We	↔	us
You	↔	you
They	↔	them

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# EXERCISES

## 1. Complete the sentences with the correct passive form of the verbs in brackets. Use the Present Simple.

- English \_\_\_\_\_ (speak) in many countries.
- The post \_\_\_\_\_ (deliver) at about 7 o'clock every morning.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (the building/use) any more?
- How often \_\_\_\_\_ (the Olympic Games/hold)?
- How \_\_\_\_\_ (your name/spell)?
- My salary \_\_\_\_\_ (pay) every month.
- These cars \_\_\_\_\_ (not make) in Japan.
- The name of the people who committed the crime \_\_\_\_\_ (not know).
- His travel expenses \_\_\_\_\_ (not pay) by his company.

## 2. Complete the sentences with the correct passive form of the verbs in brackets. Use the Past Simple.

- My car \_\_\_\_\_ (repair) last week.
- This song \_\_\_\_\_ (not write) by John Lennon.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (the phone/answer) by a young girl?
- The film \_\_\_\_\_ (make) ten years ago.
- When \_\_\_\_\_ (tennis/invent)?
- The car \_\_\_\_\_ (not damaged) in the accident.
- The original building \_\_\_\_\_ (pull) down in 1965.
- Where \_\_\_\_\_ (this pot/make)?
- When \_\_\_\_\_ (this bridge/build)?

## 3. Choose the correct form of the verbs in brackets.

### FIAT

Fiat <sup>0</sup> was started (started/was started) by a group of Italian businessmen in 1899. In 1903, Fiat, <sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (produced/was produced) 132 cars. Some of these cars <sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (exported/were exported) by the company to the United States and Britain. In 1920, Fiat <sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (started/was started) making cars at a new factory at Lingotto, near Turin. There was a track on the roof where the cars <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (tested/were tested) by technicians. In 1936, Fiat launched the Fiat 500. This car <sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (called/was called) the Topolino – the Italian name for Mickey Mouse. The company grew, and in 1963 Fiat <sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (exported/was exported) more than 300,000 vehicles. Today, Fiat is based in Turin, and its cars <sup>7</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (sold/are sold) all over the world.

## 4. Change the following sentences into passive sentences using the words in brackets.

- We sell tickets for all shows at the Box Office. (Tickets for all shows/sell/at the Box Office)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Thomas Edison invented the electric light bulb. (The electric light bulb/invent/by Thomas Edison)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Someone painted the office last week. (The office/paint/last week)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Several people saw the accident. (The accident/see/by several people)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Where do they make these video recorders? (Where/these video recorders/make)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5. Rewrite these sentences in the passive voice.**

- a. Someone built this house 200 years ago.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. A thief stole my purse.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. The police will arrest the robbers.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. They produce cars in this factory.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. They serve breakfast at eight o'clock every day.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. People throw away tones of rubbish every day.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- g. They make coffee in Brazil.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- h. Someone stole Jim's bike lat night.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6. Rewrite these sentences in the passive voice.**

- a. They will build a new bridge next year.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. Brian Brody directed *The Ultimate Space Adventure*.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. Pierre Matie will design her costume.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. Someone found my wallet.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. One of the students broke the window.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. They will deliver my computer on Monday.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- g. Mary invited Paul to her birthday party.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- h. British astronomers discovered a new planet.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Form the question.**

- |  |                                |   |
|--|--------------------------------|---|
| a. Paper is made from wood.                    | <u>Is paper made from wood</u> | ? |
| b. The telephone was invented by Mr Bell.      | _____                          | ? |
| c. This picture was painted by Peter.          | _____                          | ? |
| d. The thieves will be arrested by the police. | _____                          | ? |
| e. Champagne is made in France.                | _____                          | ? |
| f. The letters will be sent next week.         | _____                          | ? |
| g. The animals are fed three times a day.      | _____                          | ? |
| h. This article was written by Stanley.        | _____                          | ? |

- i. CDs are made of plastic. \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- j. The party was organised by Paul. \_\_\_\_\_ ?

**8. Read and complete. Use Past Simple.**

- a. The toothbrush / invent / in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. The first public basketball game / play / in 1892.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. The first eyeglasses / wear / in the 1200s.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. The first bicycle / ride in 1791.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. The first hot dog / eat / in the 1860s.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. The first CDs / sell / in the 1980s.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- g. The first electric guitar / play / in 1923.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- h. The first computer mouse / use / 1964.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**9. Complete with the passive. Use Present Simple.**

- a. This programme \_\_\_\_\_ (watch) by millions of people.
- b. Paper \_\_\_\_\_ (make) from wood.
- c. Hundreds of people \_\_\_\_\_ (kill) in accidents every year.
- d. London \_\_\_\_\_ (visit) by thousands of tourists every year.
- e. The biology class \_\_\_\_\_ (teach) by Mr Green.
- f. English \_\_\_\_\_ (speak) all over the world.
- g. Lunch \_\_\_\_\_ (serve) at twelve o'clock.
- h. Books \_\_\_\_\_ (write) by authors.

**10. Put the verbs in brackets into Past Simple Passive.**

Two men \_\_\_\_\_ (see) breaking into a house in my street last night. The police \_\_\_\_\_ (call) and they arrived very quickly. One man \_\_\_\_\_ (catch) immediately. The other escaped, but he \_\_\_\_\_ (find) very soon. Both men \_\_\_\_\_ (take) to the police station where they \_\_\_\_\_ (question) separately by a police officer. The two men \_\_\_\_\_ (charge) with burglary.

**11. Rewrite the following passage in the Passive.**

Somebody has stolen a bus from outside the school. Some children saw the thief. The police are searching for the bus now. They will use the children's descriptions to catch the thief.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**12. Rewrite the following passage in the Passive.**

Some people saw a UFO in the sky above London last night. They reported it to the police. The army sent a helicopter to look at it more closer. The UFO shot the helicopter down and killed both men in it. People have given photographs of the UFO to the police. Experts are looking at them now.

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**13. Rewrite the following passage in the Passive.**

Someone broke into a local jewellery shop yesterday. The owner had just locked up the shop when a robber with a gun threatened him. The robber told him to unlock the shop and give him all the diamonds in the safe. Then the robber tied him up. The police have organized a search for the robber. They hope they will find him in a few days. Doctors are treating the owner of the shop for shock.

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**14. Rewrite the following passage in the Passive.**

My uncle painted this picture. Someone has offered him a lot of money for it. He will deliver the painting tomorrow. When they give him the money, he will tell them the truth. He painted it one night while he was sleepwalking!

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**15. Rewrite the following passage in the Passive.**

Our school is organizing a contest. The teachers will choose the best project about the environment. The students must include pictures and drawings in their projects. The students will also have to do all the writing themselves. The school will give the winner a set of encyclopaedias.

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**16. Turn from Active to Passive in two ways.**

- a. He gave me a present. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. The waiter will bring us the bill. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Her mother bought Mary some sweets. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Bob has sold Ted a second-hand car. \_\_\_\_\_

e. Larry is going to send a letter to Tom. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**17. Turn from Active to Passive.**

a. Someone is helping her with the housework.  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. The mail-order company sent Mrs Green a parcel.  
\_\_\_\_\_

c. My friend sent me an invitation.  
\_\_\_\_\_

d. The secretary has given Mrs Jones some letters.  
\_\_\_\_\_

e. The traffic warden had already given him a ticket for illegal parking.  
\_\_\_\_\_

f. John gave Elizabeth that beautiful ring.  
\_\_\_\_\_

g. Her students have sent her flowers.  
\_\_\_\_\_

h. He must give the message to the right person.  
\_\_\_\_\_

i. We teach our students English and French.  
\_\_\_\_\_

j. Someone bought flowers for the bride.  
\_\_\_\_\_

k. They showed the tourists the sights of Athens.  
\_\_\_\_\_

l. They pay her an excellent salary.  
\_\_\_\_\_

m. They paid the artist £1,000 for his painting.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**18. 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.

51. The prime minister will give a medal to the winners.

52. She is telling the children a story.

53. They've offered Sally a job.

54. Poisonous chemicals have polluted the river.

55. Doctor Simms is examining her.

56. You must stop him now.

57. Someone gave them free tickets for the concert.