

Passive Voice


The term **'voice'** is a term that is used to denote the form of the verb which shows if the subject in a given sentence is the **doer** or **receiver** of the action.

There are two voices in the English language, the **Active Voice** and the **Passive Voice**.

The **active voice** is:

- direct and specific
- uses fewer words - always a good thing
- dynamic

active: the subject does the action and the object receives the action of the verb.

Shakespeare  *wrote* Hamlet.

passive: the subject receives the action and the object does the action of the verb.

Hamlet  *was written* by Shakespeare.

You can also make the passive using a **passive gerund** or a **passive infinitive** in the same place as a normal gerund or infinitive.

The child loves **being cuddled**.

She would like to **be promoted**.

Verbs with two objects

Some verbs that have two objects can make two different active sentences, and so two different passive sentences too:

Active: He gave me the book / He gave the book to me.

Passive: I was given the book (by him) / The book was given to me (by him).

The passive in subordinate clauses

You can make the passive in a subordinate clause that has a subject and a normal conjugated verb. This is really the same as a normal passive.

Active: He knew that people had built the church in 1915.

Passive: He knew that the church had been built in 1915.

When and why do we use passive voice?

There are several times when the passive voice is useful, and usually the decision has to do with the "doer" (agent) or the "receiver" of the action. For example, we use the passive when:

1. we want to emphasize the receiver of the action:

- *President Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald.*
cf: *Lee Harvey Oswald killed President Kennedy.*
- *The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo Da Vinci.* (We are more interested in the painting than the artist in this sentence)

2. we don't know who did the action (the agent):

- *My wallet has been stolen.*
cf: *Somebody has stolen my wallet.*

3. we think the agent is not important or interesting:

- *Our house is being painted.*
cf: *XYZ Company is painting our house.*
- *The road is being repaired* (unimportant agent).

4. the agent is obvious:

- *I am paid weekly.*
cf: *My company pays me weekly.*
- *He was arrested (obvious agent, the police).*

5. we are making general statements or announcements:

- *Passengers are reminded to fasten their seatbelts.*
cf: *The Captain reminds passengers to fasten their seatbelts.*
- *The form can be obtained from the post office (people in general).*

6. the agent is everyone:

- *The emergency services can be called by dialing 999.*
cf: *The public can call the emergency services by dialing 999.*

7. we are writing formal or scientific texts:

- *Potassium was added and mixed in. The solution was heated to 80°C and then allowed to cool.*
cf: *The technician added potassium and mixed it in. The technician heated the solution to 80°C and then allowed it to cool.*
- *The brochure will be finished next month.*

8. we want to avoid responsibility for our own actions (typically found in government reports):

- *Mistakes were made and unfortunately never rectified.*
cf: *The Prime Minister made mistakes and unfortunately never rectified them.*

9. when the subject is very long

- *I was surprised by how well the students did in the test.* (More natural)
cf: *How well the students did in the test surprised me.*

Make sentences in passive voice using the tenses in brackets. Add words where necessary.

1. Many languages – speak – in the EU (PRESENT SIMPLE)

2. The lawn – not mow –last week (PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE)

3. The postman – not see – recently (PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE)

4. The Gothic cathedral – build – 10th century. (PAST SIMPLE)

5. The jewels – find – in the basement. (PAST SIMPLE)

6. The schoolhouse – repair – today (PRESENT PROGRESSIVE)

7. The prize – award – tomorrow (FUTURE SIMPLE)

8. When I came in – the fridge – repair (PAST PROGRESSIVE)

9. After the shop – close – it – sell (PAST PERFECT SIMPLE – PAST SIMPLE)

Rewrite the sentences and make them passive.

1. They are serving breakfast in the dining room.

2. Settlers built this town in 1802.

3. You must clean your suit for the ceremony.

4. The authorities are opening the town health centre next week.

5. You cannot reach this village by train.

6. After John had repaired the car, he sold it.

7. Steven King wrote the book.

8. You should send the email today.

9. The doctor must examine you again.

10. The company has produced cars since the beginning of the century.

11. The Egyptians buried pharaohs in pyramids.

12. They will meet you at the train station.

13. Has everyone read the instructions?

14. The nurse reads the newspaper to the old man every day.

15. They must have left the documents behind.

16. Families in poor countries often force their children to work.

17. People say that he is a good surfer.

18. They should have redecorated the house before Christmas.

Make two possible answers in the passive.

1. John gave a bar of chocolate to Jill.

a: _____

b: _____

2. I sent the email to John.

a: _____

b: _____

3. Fiona told the truth to Julian.

a: _____

b: _____

4. They offered the job to Simon.

a: _____

b: _____

5. Sophia sold the car to a doctor.

a: _____

b: _____

6. Julie taught the grammar to the students.

a: _____

b: _____

Complete the sentences with the correct active or passive form of the verb in brackets.

1. At last night's ceremony, they _____ the award to an unknown actress. (GIVE)
2. The survivors _____ by a cruise ship that _____ to be near them. (RESCUE, HAPPEN)
3. Two hours after the accident the doctor _____ him dead. (DECLARE)
4. I remember _____ to the circus by my father. (TAKE)
5. The weather _____ in the next few days. (NOT IMPROVE)
6. Coffee _____ before you _____ it. (MUST ROAST, SELL)
7. The bridge _____ at the moment so it _____. (REPAIR, CANNOT USE)
8. The police _____ the victim a picture of the suspect. (SHOW)
9. The new staff members _____ all the help they need. (GIVE)
10. That door _____ for ages. (NOT OPEN)
11. A few days ago, a judge _____ him to appear before court next month. (ORDER)
12. The Times _____ such a shocking letter before. (NEVER PUBLISH)
13. They _____ on what to do when the headmaster _____ in. (INSTRUCT, COME)
14. The vandals _____ bottles into windows and _____ a few cars. (THROW, DESTROY)
15. The new teammates _____ more time to get accustomed to the practice sessions. (SHOULD GIVE)

16. After dad _____ me to the zoo, he _____ me some new clothes at the department store. (TAKE, BUY)

17. I _____ to the party last Thursday because I _____. (NOT GO, NOT INVITE)

18. I _____ so surprised by such an outstanding performance before. (NEVER BE)

19. When we _____ out of the cinema, the bus _____ to take us home. (COME, WAIT)

20. All the papers _____ in by next Friday. (MUST HAND)

Make sentences in passive voice using the tenses in brackets. Add words where necessary.

1. Many languages – speak – in the EU (PRESENT SIMPLE)

Many languages are spoken in the EU.

2. The lawn – not mow –last week (PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE)

The lawn has not been mowed since last week.

3. The postman – not see – recently (PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE)

The postman hasn't been seen recently.

4. The Gothic cathedral – build – 10th century. (PAST SIMPLE)

The Gothic cathedral was built in the 10th century.

5. The jewels – find – in the basement. (PAST SIMPLE)

The jewels were found in the basement.

6. The schoolhouse – repair – today (PRESENT PROGRESSIVE)

The schoolhouse is being repaired today.

7. The prize – award – tomorrow (FUTURE SIMPLE)

The prize will be awarded tomorrow.

8. When I came in – the fridge – repair (PAST PROGRESSIVE)

When I came in the fridge was being repaired.

9. After the shop – close – it – sell (PAST PERFECT SIMPLE – PAST SIMPLE)

After the shop had been closed it was sold.

Rewrite the sentences and make them passive.

1. They are serving breakfast in the dining room.

Breakfast is being served in the dining room.

2. Settlers built this town in 1802.

This town was built in 1802.

3. You must clean your suit for the ceremony.

The suit must be cleaned for the ceremony.

4. The authorities are opening the town health centre next week.

The town health centre is being opened next week.

5. You cannot reach this village by train.

This village cannot be reached by train.

6. After John had repaired the car, he sold it.

After the car had been repaired it was sold.

7. Steven King wrote the book.

The book was written by Stephen King.

8. You should send the email today.

The email should be sent today.

9. The doctor must examine you again.

You must be examined again (by the doctor).

10. The company has produced cars since the beginning of the century.

Cars have been produced since the beginning of the century.

11. The Egyptians buried pharaohs in pyramids.

Pharaohs were buried in pyramids by the Egyptians.

12. They will meet you at the train station.

You will be met at the strain station.

13. Has everyone read the instructions?

Have the instructions been read (by everyone)?

14. The nurse reads the newspaper to the old man every day.

The newspaper is read to the old man by the nurse every day.

15. They must have left the documents behind.

The documents must have been left behind.

16. Families in poor countries often force their children to work.

Children in poor countries are often forced to work by their families.

17. People say that he is a good surfer.

He is said to be a good surfer.

18. They should have redecorated the house before Christmas.

The house should have been redecorated before Christmas.

Make two possible answers in the passive.

1. John gave a bar of chocolate to Jill.

a: Jill was given a bar of chocolate (by John).

b: A bar of chocolate was given to Jill (by John).

2. I sent the email to John.

a: Graham was lent a pencil (by me).

b: A pencil was lent to Graham (by me).

3. Fiona told the truth to Julian.

a: Julian was told the truth (by Fiona).

b: The truth was told to Julian (by Fiona).

4. They offered the job to Simon.

a: Simon was offered the job (by them).

b: The job was offered to Simon (by them).

5. Sophia sold the car to a doctor.

a: A doctor was sold the car (by Sophia).

b: The car was sold to a doctor (by Sophia).

6. Julie taught the grammar to the students.

a: The students were taught the grammar (by Julie).

b: The grammar was taught to the students (by Julie).

Complete the sentences with the correct active or passive form of the verb in brackets.

1. At last night's ceremony, they **gave** the award to an unknown actress. (GIVE)
2. The survivors **were rescued** by a cruise ship that **happened** to be near them. (RESCUE, HAPPEN)
3. Two hours after the accident the doctor **declared** him dead. (DECLARE)
4. I remember **being taken** to the circus by my father. (TAKE)
5. The weather **will not improve** in the next few days. (NOT IMPROVE)
6. Coffee **must be roasted** before you **sell** it. (MUST ROAST, SELL)
7. The bridge **is being repaired** at the moment so it **can't be used**. (REPAIR, CANNOT USE)
8. The police **showed** the victim a picture of the suspect. (SHOW)
9. The new staff members **will be given** all the help they need. (GIVE)
10. That door **hasn't been opened** for ages. (NOT OPEN)
11. A few days ago, a judge **ordered** him to appear before court next month. (ORDER)
12. The Times **have never published** such a shocking letter before. (NEVER PUBLISH)
13. They **were being instructed** on what to do when the headmaster came in. (INSTRUCT, COME)
14. The vandals **threw** bottles into windows and **destroyed** a few cars. (THROW, DESTROY)
15. The new teammates **should be given** more time to get accustomed to the practice sessions. (SHOULD GIVE)

16. After dad **had taken** me to the zoo, he **bought** me some new clothes at the department store. (TAKE, BUY)
17. I **didn't go** to the party last Thursday because I **was not invited/ had not been invited**. (NOT GO, NOT INVITE)
18. I **have never been** so surprised by such an outstanding performance before. (NEVER BE)
19. When we **came** out of the cinema, the bus **was waiting** to take us home. (COME, WAIT)
20. All the papers **must be handed** in by next Friday. (MUST HAND)