

OVERVIEW

1 FORM OF THE PASSIVE

We form the passive using *be* in an appropriate tense or form + the past participle of a transitive verb:

*A small sum of money **was stolen** from the cash box.*

*They **ought to have been punished** more severely.*

***Having been beaten** in the semi-final, she flew home the next day.*

- In spoken English, we sometimes use *get* instead of *be* in the passive:
*They **got told off** for making so much noise.*
- However, *get* + *-ed* is more common with an active meaning similar to 'become' in phrases like *get dressed*, *get married*, etc. (See Section 3.2).

2 REASONS FOR USING THE PASSIVE

In English, the topic or subject matter is commonly at the beginning of the sentence, and new information about the subject is normally at the end. In an active sentence, the 'agent' (the person or thing that performs the action) usually comes first and is the subject of the sentence:

Subject (Agent)	Action	Result
<i>Olympiakos</i>	<i>scored</i>	<i>the first goal.</i>

This active sentence is principally about Olympiakos.

- In the passive, the result or thing affected by the action comes first and is the subject of the sentence:

Subject (Result)	Action	Agent
<i>The first goal</i>	<i>was scored</i>	<i>by Olympiakos.</i>

This passive sentence is principally about the goal.

We choose between active and passive because of the topic we are talking about, especially when reporting information. An English newspaper, assuming its readers are interested in the England football team, makes the England team the topic. It is likely to report:

*England **have been beaten** by Germany in a penalty shoot-out.*

A German newspaper, more interested in their own national team, is likely to report:

*Germany **has beaten** England in a penalty shoot-out.*

Other reasons for using the passive include:

- the agent is unknown or obvious (see also Section 1):
*I **was born** in 1982.*
*Coffee **will be made** available after the meal.*
- the agent is 'people or things in general':
*Some verbs **cannot be used** in the Continuous.*
- the agent is a long phrase:
*Helen was surprised **by all the messages of sympathy that she received**.*
- avoiding references to ourselves and making a statement impersonal:
*We **can't** possibly **complete** this work overnight.*
becomes: *This work **can't** possibly **be completed** overnight.* (= the work is the problem, not us)
- avoiding 'you' in orders and rules:
You must give in your application before the end of the week. becomes: *All applications **must be given in** before the end of the week.*
- in factual writing when the focus is usually on events, achievements, etc. rather than agents:
*Vaccination **had been pioneered** two hundred years earlier.*



watch out!

- Not all *be* + *-ed* forms are passive. They may be adjectives:
*I **was worried** we would be late because of the traffic.*
- We avoid passive constructions with *be being* or *been being*, although they sometimes occur in spoken English:
Avoid: *The road ~~will have been being repaired~~ for months.*
✓ *They **will have been repairing** the road for months.* or: *The road **will have been under repair** for months.*

SECTION I

Agents and objects with the passive

1 THE AGENT

Not mentioning the agent

In most passive sentences we have no interest in who or what performs the action. We are interested in the action itself, who or what is affected by the action, or what is the result of it (see Overview). In fact, only about 20% of passive sentences mention the agent:

*That window **has been broken** again!*

Mentioning the agent

We mention the agent when we think the information is important, especially if we want to say more about it, for example with a relative clause:

*I remember **being taken** to the fair **by my father**, who rarely showed any interest in such things.*

*The survivors **were picked out** of the water **by a cruise liner** which had heard their distress call.*

- The agent is usually introduced with *by* (See Section 6.3 for prepositions after passives).

2 VERBS WITH TWO OBJECTS

Verbs that have two objects (usually a person and a thing) in the active usually have two passive forms because either of the objects can become the new subject:

*They **gave the award** to an unknown actress.*

(= active)

***The award** was given to an unknown actress.*

(= passive)

An unknown actress was given the award.

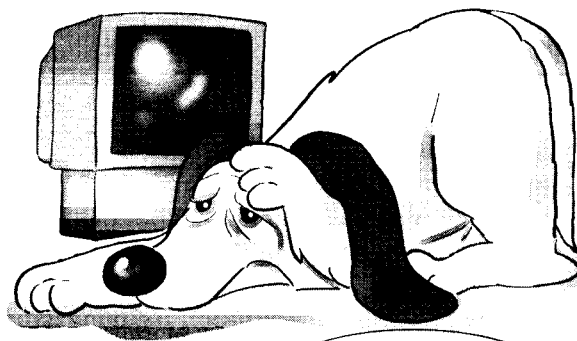
(= passive)

- We usually add a preposition before the personal object. The preposition is usually *to*, but we sometimes use *for*:
*A note **was handed to** the minister.*
*A slice of cake **was cut for** him.*
- However, some verbs, e.g. *allow*, *ask*, *cause*, *forgive*, *deny*, don't normally take a preposition before the personal object:
*Permission **was refused** him.*

3 VERBS WITH LIMITED USE IN THE PASSIVE

We can't use some verbs as freely in the passive as others.

- We can't use intransitive verbs in the passive because they don't have an object that can be changed into the subject:
~~✗ *The Tasmanian tiger **was died out** early this century.*~~
✓ *The Tasmanian tiger **died out** early this century.*
- Some verbs, e.g. *suggest* and *explain*, can't change the indirect object to subject:
~~✗ *He **was explained** the procedure.*~~
~~*We **were suggested** a new time.*~~
✓ *The procedure **was explained to** him.*
*A new time **was suggested for** us.*
- Some verb phrases with two objects can't be passive at all:
*I **bear him no ill will**.*
*The book **earned him a fortune**.*
*Let me **wish you luck**.*
- Some verbs are followed by two nouns, but the second is not really an object. We can see this if it is replaced by an adjective:
*They **declared him President**.*
*He **was declared President**.*
*The doctor **declared him dead**.*
*He **was declared dead**.*



? check

Correct the following sentences.

- Man and wife they were pronounced.
- I was explained what I had to do.
- His previous misdemeanours were forgiven to him.
- He ~~was~~ earned a lot of money from his betting.
- We were suggested a good restaurant for lunch.

Practice

1 Fill each of the gaps in the following sentences with one of the passive verb phrases below.

*is deemed could soon be fitted were charged has been held
has finally been elected is expected being caused to be printed
is auctioned being considered*

- High-tech 'leg-irons' on violent suspects arrested by the police, under plans by chief constables.
- Last week, police in Scotland called for the introduction of leg-restraints following concerns about the number of injuries during struggles in the back of police cars and vans.
- Four people last night with public disorder offences after officers mounted dawn raids on suspected football hooligans.
- Hugh Hefner, founder of 'Playboy', to the American Society of Magazine Editors' Hall of Fame.
- A first edition copy of Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales', the first book in England, to raise at least £500,000 when it in July.
- A British woman released early from an attempted murder sentence in the United States – a charge which she has always denied – in prison because she an illegal immigrant.

2 Add the appropriate extra information (a–e) to the passive sentences (1–5).

- The news was leaked to the press by the minister ...
- The minister was attacked by protesters, ...
- I remember being sent a letter by a man in America ...
- The winning goal was scored by Fausto Ferrini ...
- A man was run over by a car, ...
 - in his first appearance for the club.
 - who had waited outside the building all day to voice their opposition to the policies.
 - in a deliberate attempt to boost his popularity.
 - who complained my article was prejudiced against his country.
 - which witnesses said was being driven at very high speed.

3 Where possible, rewrite each of the following sentences in two different ways, using a different subject each time. Some sentences may be rewritten only one way.

- The police showed the victim a picture of the suspect.
- People used to sell the tourists fake antiques.
- Why didn't they offer the customers a refund?
- They didn't guarantee every participant a free lunch.
- They reported the incident to the police.
- People suggested to us that the Internet would be a good source of information.
- They promised us full compensation if the scheme fell through.
- The referee declared the boxing match a draw.
- We'll give the new members of staff all the help they need.
- The incident earned him the reputation of being unreliable.

4 Fill each of the numbered blanks in the following passage with one suitable word.

Twenty-four hours after arriving in the country, I (1) told to leave. The security police, the country's largest employer, came to my hotel, politely asked me what I thought of the city and then recommended that I leave on the morning plane. I asked them why I was (2) expelled and they said it was not a question of my being '..... (3) out', they were simply recommending that I leave. I refused and the problems started. My passport and plane ticket (4) stolen from my room after my key 'disappeared'. The police shrugged their shoulders and decided not to interview the leather-jacketed youth who I (5) been pressed up against in the lift. For three days I was (6) by two not very secret policemen everywhere I went. I visited a fellow-journalist whose address I had (7) given. He lived in a beautiful old house which would (8) demolished the following year by the government to make way for a block of 'modern' flats. Everybody would be (9) in it as soon as it was ready but where they would live in the meantime had not been (10) out. Massive taxation was (11) imposed on the people to pay for these supposed improvements. I went back to the hotel, still (12) followed by the two policemen, and felt very depressed.

SECTION 2

Infinitives and -ing form passives

1 INFINITIVES AFTER CERTAIN VERBS

Make, see, hear, and help have different patterns in the active and the passive. In the active, the verb is followed by object + infinitive without *to*. In the passive, we use a *to*-infinitive:

Active	Passive
<i>I heard him shout at his brother.</i>	<i>He was heard to shout at his brother.</i>
<i>They've made him promise not to come before six.</i>	<i>He's been made to promise not to come before six.</i>

watch out!

Let v. allow

We can't use *let* in the passive when it is followed by a verb phrase. We use *allow*:

My parents let me do what I wanted. (= active)

✗ *I was let to do what I wanted.*

✓ *I was allowed to do what I wanted.*

- But we can use *let* in the passive in phrases like:
The dog was let loose. I was badly let down.

2 PASSIVE INFINITIVES

We form the passive infinitive of verbs by putting *to be* (sometimes *to get*) in front of the past participle:

Active	Passive
<i>There's so much to do.</i>	<i>There's so much to be done.</i>
<i>I've got to write this essay before Friday.</i>	<i>This essay has got to be written before Friday.</i>
<i>If I'm going to do it by then, I'd better get a move on.</i>	<i>If it's going to be done by then, I'd better get a move on.</i>

- We use Perfect passive infinitives to emphasise that something is or isn't completed (See also Unit 1, Section 2 Watch out!):
My new car was to have been delivered today but there was a problem with the paintwork.

Active or passive infinitive?

- If the subject is the agent, the sentence is active and we use an active infinitive:
I've got so many library books to return.

- If the subject is not the agent, we use a passive infinitive:

All systems are to be checked as soon as possible.

- We can use some active and passive infinitives with the same meaning, especially after *There*:
There are so many rooms to paint / to be painted.
- But, with *something, anything* and *nothing* + *to do* there can be a change in meaning:
There's nothing to do in the evenings. (= we're bored)
I'm sorry, there's nothing to be done. (= there's no action anyone can take)

3 REPORT VERBS

We often use report verbs, e.g. *claim, mention, request, point out*, with impersonal passive constructions.

There are three main patterns:

It's thought by the press that the chairman earns too much. The chairman is thought by the press to earn too much. There are thought to be disagreements among senior ministers.

- We often introduce a statement with *They say, think, believe*, etc. or *It is said... / One knows...*, etc. meaning 'People generally think, believe, etc. ...':
It's thought that carrots improve eyesight. (= Carrots are believed to improve eyesight.)

4 PASSIVE -ING FORMS

We use passive -ing forms (*being* + -ed) and Perfect passive -ing forms (*having been* + -ed):

- after verbs that are normally followed by -ing forms (see Unit 15):
I love being given flowers. She recalled having been taken there when she was young.
- as participles, usually with the meaning of 'because' (see Unit 6, Section 1):
Being paid monthly, I find annual bills hard to pay. Having been stung by bees, she has no love of insects.
- as the subject of a sentence:
Being proved wrong is never a comfortable experience.

? check

Underline the passives in these sentences.

- They are believed to have left the country.
- She is thought to have been smuggled out of the country in the back of a lorry.
- They were seen to leave the room together.
- He is said to be recovering well.
- The whole place was cleaned until there was not a speck of dust to be seen anywhere.

Practice

1 Fill each of the blanks with a suitable word.

Example: New measures to combat crime **are to be** introduced at the end of the year.

- a We strongly advised reconsider our position.
- b He is known hidden large sums of money in his orchard.
- c They are understood have offered over £5000 for their story.
- d I always made apologise to my little sister after an argument.
- e It's too late now: there's nothing more be
- f I left with the distinct feeling of been for granted.
- g I used to steal walnuts from my grandfather's garden and never worried about out.
- h There are any survivors from yesterday's air crash.

2 Finish each of the following sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible to the sentence before it.

Example: Many people believe that Stonehenge was built as some kind of time-keeping device.
 Stonehenge **is believed by many people to have been built as some kind of time-keeping device.**

- a They made me tell them everything I knew.
 I
- b Nobody ever let me study the piano at school.
 I
- c It is often said that Shakespeare never revised anything he wrote.
 Shakespeare
- d There were once thought to be canals on Mars.
 It
- e From what we understand, there was an attack last night in the vicinity of the beach.
 There is
- f It's a widespread assumption that George was wrongly accused.
 George
- g You have to clean these football boots until they shine.
 These football boots are
- h Under no circumstances should you cross this line.
 This line is

3 For each of the sentences, write a new sentence as similar as possible in meaning to the original sentence, but using the word given.

Example: A lot of people are saying that he's working undercover. **rumoured**
 It's **rumoured** that he's working undercover. /
 He's **rumoured to be** working undercover.

- a She wants it to be clear to people that she's fair.
seen
- b He often says to people how much of his success is down to you.
heard
- c The theory is that she fell overboard at night and drowned.
fallen
- d We certainly don't want any repetition of such a ridiculous spectacle ever again.
repeated
- e The plan was originally to complete the building by June.
due
- f When I was a child, I was never allowed to play with the children next door.
let

4 Finish each of the following sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible to the sentence before it.

Example: He didn't remember that he had been ordered to appear before the judge.
 He had no recollection of **being ordered to appear before the judge.**

- a She vaguely remembers that she was knocked down by a motorbike.
 She has vague memories of
- b It's never very nice when people laugh at you.
 Being
- c Stewart was criticised for his extravagance and was more careful after that.
 Having
- d I really wish I hadn't been pushed into giving a speech.
 I really regret
- e Because I was told it was quicker, I naturally took the mountain road.
 Having
- f I can't tell you what it feels like because nobody's ever given me £100,000.
 Never