

There are **two voices in English, the active and the passive**. The active tells us what the subject does, for example:

- The secretary wrote a letter.

The passive tells us what is done to the subject. For example:

- The letter was written by the secretary.

Form

The passive is made with the verb "to be" and the past participle. Here are the main English tenses used in the passive voice.

How to construct the passive.

1. Check to see if the active sentence contains an object.

John ate an apple. (S V O) Passive is possible.

John ate yesterday. (S V) Passive is not possible.

2. Move the object to the front of the sentence. Put the original subject in a "by" phrase .

An apple (V) by John.

3. Put the verb in the form "be" +3 (of main verb)

An apple " be " eaten by John.

4. Put the "be" in the same tense as the original active sentence.

An apple was/were eaten by John. (past tense)

5. Make the first verb agree with the new subject.

An apple was eaten by John.

Tense	Subject	Verb "to be"	Past Participle
Simple present:	Flowers	are	planted every year
Present continuous:	Flowers	are being	planted now.
Simple past:	Flowers	were	planted last year
Past continuous:	Flowers	were being	planted last summer.

Present perfect:	Flowers	have been	planted here for 10 years.
Past perfect:	Flowers	had been	planted until last year.
Future:	Flowers	will be	planted next year.
Future continuous:	Flowers	will be being	planted during the summer.
Present conditional:	Flowers	would be	planted if we had seeds.
Past conditional:	Flowers	would have been	planted if we had had seeds.

By

To state what the cause of a passive action is, you can use *by*. For example:

- This photo was taken **by my friend**.
- I was given this **by my brother**.

It is often not necessary to state the cause of a passive action, especially when clearly understood or irrelevant. For example:

The meeting was cancelled. (The meeting's cancellation is what is important, not who cancelled it.)
 These boots were made in Italy. (The fact they were made in Italy is what's important, not who made them.)

Born

When talking about the birth of specific people or things we use the passive form "to be born". For example:

- I was born in Iran.
- The twins were born just last year.

Get

Get can be used instead of *to be* in situations where something happens. For example:

- Our flight **got** cancelled = Our flight **was** cancelled.
- I **got** paid today = I **was** paid today.

Get can't be used with general situations and state verbs (verbs that express a state, not an action). For example:

- He **is** liked by a lot of people. - OK
- He **gets** liked by a lot of people. - Incorrect.
- She **is** known to be a hard-working employee. - OK
- She **gets** known to be a hard-working employee. - Incorrect

Get is used more often in informal English.

Changing the voice of a verb which takes both a direct object and an indirect object

When a verb in the Active Voice takes both a direct object and an indirect object, either object can become the subject of the verb when the verb is put into the Passive Voice, and the meaning of the sentence is preserved. The object which does not become the subject remains as an object. When a verb in the Passive Voice takes an indirect object, the indirect object is usually preceded by a preposition.

e.g. Active: The guide will show you the **museum**.

Passive: You will be shown the **museum** by the guide.

Passive: The museum will be shown to you by the guide.

In the first sentence, the verb **will show**, in the Active Voice, takes the direct object **museum**, and the indirect object **you**. In the second and third sentences, the verb **will be shown** is in the Passive Voice, and the meaning has been preserved by altering the word order and using the preposition **by**. In the second sentence, the former indirect object, **you**, is the subject of the verb, and the former direct object, **museum**, remains the direct object. In the third sentence, the former direct object, **museum**, is the subject of the verb, and the former indirect object, **you**, is preceded by the preposition **to**.

Why do we use passive sentences?

1. We use the passive voice when the receiver of the action is more important in our communication than the one who did it (the actor of the verb).
 - The president was assassinated this morning.
2. We can use the passive when we don't know who did the action.
 - The bank was robbed yesterday.
3. We use the passive when we don't need to say who did the action.
 - The bill was signed into law at noon.
4. We can use the passive to avoid saying who did the action.
 - The employees were laid off just before the holidays.

Warning! Some verbs cannot be used in the passive form.

Intransitive Verbs

Intransitive verbs (verbs which do not take objects) cannot be used to form passive sentences.

Some examples of common intransitive verbs.

- *come*
- *die*
- *go*
- *happen*
- *itch*
- *occur*
- *rain*

- *rise*
- *walk*

John came to the meeting.*John was come to the meeting (incorrect).
 The cat died in the street.*The cat was died in the street (incorrect).
 We went to the zoo.*We were gone to the zoo (incorrect).
 My back itches.*My back is itched (incorrect).
 The incident occurred last week.*The incident was occurred last week(incorrect)
 It rained this morning.*It was rained this morning (incorrect).
 Gas prices are rising again.*Gas prices are being risen again (incorrect).
 John walked to the store by himself.*John was walked to the store by himself (incorrect).

Measure Verbs

There are a couple measure verbs that also cannot be used in the passive.

- This ring **costs** a lot of money.
- *A lot of money was cost by this ring (incorrect).
- This fish **weighs** a lot.
- *A lot was weighed by this fish (incorrect).