


The passive

The presentation is divided into three levels:

 = *Lower-intermediate/Intermediate*

 = *Upper-intermediate*

 = *Advanced*

the passive

Look at the sample sentences:

- The government **raised** interest rates by 1%.
- Interest rates **were raised** by 1%.
- They **have closed** fifty retail outlets over the last year.
- Fifty retail outlets **have been closed** over the last year.

We use	an ACTIVE VERB (wrote, plays)	to say WHAT THE SUBJECT DOES
We use	a PASSIVE VERB (were published, is played)	to say WHAT HAPPENS TO THE SUBJECT

be (*is/was/has been...*) + **the past participle** (*done/cleaned/built...*)

We use *BY...* if we want to introduce the agent (who or what causes the action): Apple was founded **by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak**.

When is the passive used?

- if the agent is not known

My laptop was stolen last month.

- if the agent is unimportant or obvious

The robber was arrested. (*the police is the agent*)

- if you want to start a sentence with an object (of a Czech sentence)

The contract was signed by the director.

(~~*NOT The contract signed the director.*~~)

- If and only if the verb needs an object.

(**NOT** with verbs which do not need an object: e.g. arrive)

I arrived late.

- if the agent is the key information in a sentence

Microsoft was set up by Bill Gates. (*not by Steve Jobs*)

the passive and tenses

Passive voice is used in all tenses:

- English **is spoken** all over the world.

PRESENT SIMPLE

- Charles University **was founded** in 1348.

PAST SIMPLE

- I **have been invited** to a conference.

PRESENT PERFECT

- The project **will not be finished** in time.

FUTURE SIMPLE

- The drug **is going to be tested** on animals.

FUTURE WITH GOING TO

practice

Rewrite the sentences using passive voice:

1. Somebody cleans Tom's office twice a week.

Tom's office is cleaned twice a week.

2. Sam repaired the car.

The car was repaired by Sam.

3. Many tourists have recently visited the castle.

The castle has recently been visited by many tourists.

4. Someone will finish the translation by 5 p.m.

The translation will be finished by 5 p.m.

5. They are going to serve a delicious dinner tonight.

A delicious dinner is going to be served tonight.

practice

Decide whether to use active or passive voice and fill in the gaps:

The police have just announced (announce) that the Portnoy's Bank was robbed (rob) yesterday. Two men entered (enter) the bank at 4.30 with guns in their hands. Customers and bank clerks were asked (ask) to lie down on the floor and one of the bank clerks was made (make) to fill the robbers' bags with money. After that the two men left (leave) the bank quickly. The police officer Jason Gregson says that more than 200,000 pounds were stolen (steal) yesterday, but nobody was injured (injure). Jason Gregson believes that the robbers will be found (find) soon. The bank has been closed (close) since yesterday.

passive and tenses

Passive voice is used in all tenses including the following:

- The data **is being processed** right now.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

- Many valuable buildings **had been destroyed** before the government started protecting historical buildings.

PAST PERFECT

- The customer **was being served** when all the lights went out.

PAST CONTINUOUS

- The project **will have been completed** by Friday.

FUTURE PERFECT

- The book **would be published** if it were written by a famous writer.

CONDITIONAL

practice

Rewrite the following active sentences using the passive form:

- They are going to close the factory.

The factory is going to be closed.

- They are still considering the matter.

The matter is still being considered.

- They were making every effort to end the strike.

Every effort was being made to end the strike.

- They had finished the work by the end of 2006.

The work had been finished by the end of 2006.

- By 2020 women will have achieved full equality.

By 2020 full equality for women will have been achieved.

verbs with two objects

Look at the sample sentences:

- The company sent *the supplier* **a letter**.

indirect object **direct object**

(1) The supplier was sent a letter (by the company).

(2) A letter was sent to the supplier (by the company).

A passive sentence is made by turning the object of an active sentence into the subject of a passive sentence. If a verb has two objects (a direct object and an indirect object), two passive sentences can be made.

- Both options are grammatically correct but the first option is more common in English.
- This applies mainly to the following verbs: **give, lend, offer, pay, send, sell, show, promise, tell.**

practice

Rewrite the following active sentences into passive sentences, each starting with a different subject in each of them. You may need to omit the agents.

- They have offered **me the job**.
 1. I have been offered the job.
 2. The job has been offered to me.
- They showed **us the financial statements**.
 1. We were shown the financial statements.
 2. The financial statements were shown to us.
- Someone promised **the employees higher salaries**.
 1. The employees were promised higher salaries.
 2. Higher salaries were promised to the employees.
- They will pay **the workers £50** every Friday.
 1. The workers will be paid £50 every Friday.
 2. £50 will be paid to the workers every Friday.

causative *get* and *have*

Look at the sample sentences:

- I'm **getting/having the photocopier repaired** at the moment.
- I will need **to get/have my blood pressure checked**.

get/have + object + past participle

In the passive form, causative *get* and *have* mean “arrange for somebody else to do something (and usually pay for it)”.

Active form:

- I'll **get** the supplier **to repair** the photocopier.
- Shall I **have** my doctor **check** my blood pressure?

In the active form, causative *get* and *have* mean “ask or cause somebody to do something”.

These structures can be used in all tenses.

practice

Rewrite each sentence so that it contains causative get/have in the passive form:

1. A translator is translating a business letter for me.

I'm having/getting a business letter translated.

2. The Dean will have a painter to paint a portrait for him.

The Dean will have/get his portrait painted.

3. Isn't it time someone fixed your television?

Isn't it time you had/got your television fixed?

4. Helen's publisher has just published her book.

Helen has just had/got her book published.

5. I had a dressmaker make a dress for me.

I had/got my dress made by a dressmaker.

6. I should get someone service my car.

I should have/get my car serviced.

7. The men are going to install central heating in our warehouse.

We are going to have/get central heating installed in the warehouse.

reporting with passive verbs (1)

Look at the following examples:

- **It is reported that** the Finance Minister is going to resign.
- **It has been acknowledged that** the company is understaffed.
- **It can be seen that** prices rose sharply in September.

it + passive verb + that clause

We often use the following passive structure to report what people say/think..., particularly if we want to avoid mentioning who said/thought... what is reported:

This pattern can be used with the following verbs:

agree, announce, assume, calculate, claim, consider, decide, declare, discover, estimate, expect, feel, find, know, mention, propose, recommend, say, show, suggest, suppose, think, understand.

With verbs **agree**, **decide**, **forbid**, **hope**, **plan**, and **propose**, the following structure can be used:

it + passive + to-infinitive

Example: **It was agreed to set up** a committee.

reporting with passive verbs (2)

Look at the following examples:

- It is said that **the company** is almost bankrupt.
- **The company is said to be** almost bankrupt.
- It was expected that **the damage** would be extensive.
- **The damage was expected to be** extensive.
- It has been confirmed that **some findings** of the study are invalid.
- **Some findings of the study have been confirmed to be** invalid.

A reporting sentence does not have to start with „it“, it may also start with the subject of the reported sentence. The verb in the passive form is followed by an infinitive.

subject + passive verb + to-infinitive

practice

Complete the second sentence and keep the meaning as close to the first sentence as possible, using the word given. The word must not be changed.

1. They say the country is on the verge of civil war. **SAID**
The country **is said to be** on the verge of civil war.
2. People thought the President was ill. **BE**
The President **was thought to be** ill.
3. They thought he was the best actor for the part. **CONSIDERED**
He **was considered to be** the best actor for the part.
4. The directors decided to discuss the matter later. **AGREED**
It **was agreed** that the directors **would discuss** the matter later.
5. The court ordered him to pay a fine of £100. **WAS**
He **was ordered to pay a fine of £100** by the court.
6. People believe that he owns houses all over the city. **OWN**
He **is believed to own** houses all over Brno.
7. Reports say that D1 highway is blocked by traffic jams. **BE**
Highway D1 **is reported to be blocked by** traffic jams.

the passive gerund

Look at the sample sentences:

- She enjoys **being interviewed**.
- Her boss **insists on being updated** regularly.
- I hate **being constantly told** what to do.
- **Being served** quickly is very important for customers in a restaurant.

Gerunds function as nouns. They are not verbs in the continuous form.
Gerunds can be both active and PASSIVE.

active	She likes telling people what to do.	She tells people what they are supposed to do and she likes it.
passive	He hates being told what to do.	Other people tell him what to do and he hates it.

practice

Use the verb in brackets to form a passive gerund.

1. The students don't look forward to being tested (TEST) on their math skills.
2. The customer insists on being given (GIVE) a refund for his purchase.
3. Martha hates being pushed (PUSH) into staying late at work.
4. Being asked (ASK) unpleasant questions is a necessary part of a job interview.
5. Being forced (FORCE) to resign from a top job was very difficult for the director.

reporting about an earlier event

Look at the following sample sentences.

- **He is believed to have earned** his money by smuggling.
(They **believe** that he **has earned** his money by smuggling.)
- **Lucy was known to have graduated** from Oxford.
(Everybody **knew** that Lucy **had graduated** from Oxford.)

**Subject + passive reporting verb + to-infinitive
(perfect or perfect continuous)**

If the **reported event happens before the reporting**, we use **perfect infinitives or perfect continuous infinitives**, depending on whether the verb in the reported clause was simple or continuous.

reporting about an earlier event

The reporting may happen in the present:

They **believe...**

and the reported event in the past:

The counterfeits **were made** in China.

The counterfeits ***are believed***
reporting

to have been made in China.
reported event

Everybody ***knows*** that she **was/has been studying** Spanish for years.

She ***is known to have been studying*** Spanish for years.

The reporting may also happen in the past:

They **claimed...**

and the reported event in the earlier past:

The documents **had been signed** by the CEO.

The documents ***were claimed***
reporting

to have been signed by the CEO.
reported event

Everybody ***thought*** that the organizers **had been preparing** for days.

The organizers ***were thought to have been preparing*** for days.

practice

Rewrite the following sentences with the passive form of the reporting verb and active or passive infinitive:

1. They believe that the tourists are safe.

The tourists **are believed to be** safe.

2. They reported that the suspect has fled the country.

The suspect **was reported to have fled** the country.

3. People think that the soldiers were killed by rebels.

The soldiers **are thought to have been killed** by rebels.

4. Everybody knows that cancers is caused by smoking.

Cancer **is known to be caused by** smoking.

5. Everyone thought that the documents were destroyed in the fire.

The documents **were thought to have been destroyed** in the fire.

6. Everybody assumed that Lucy had finished the project the day before.

Lucy **was assumed to have finished** the project the day before.

verbs which cannot be used in the passive voice

Intransitive verbs – verbs which do not take an object – cannot be passive:

- He was walking too slowly.
- We arrived late.

Certain state verbs are not used in the passive even if they are transitive (take an object). These are for example: *belong, suit, lack...*

- John has three sisters.
- I'm afraid Friday doesn't suit me.

Some verbs are always passive

- I **was born** in 1965.
- The area **is inhabited** by families with small children.

additional points

Active verbs with a passive meaning:

- The new tablet **doesn't sell** as well as they supposed.
- The sign on the door **read** “No entry”.

Active gerunds after need, require and want also have a passive meaning.

- The room needs painting. (i.e. It should be painted.)
- The gas bombs require careful handling. (i.e. They should be handled carefully.)

Passive verbs with an active meaning:

- My mother is retired now. (i.e. She has retired.)
- Those times are gone. (i.e. Those times have gone.)

active and passive tenses chart

SIMPLE PRESENT and SIMPLE PAST

The active object becomes the passive subject.

am/is/are + past participle

was/were + past participle

Active: Simple Present

The movie fascinates me.

Passive: Simple Present

I am fascinated by the movie.

Active: Simple Past

The movie bored me.

Passive: Simple Past

I was bored by the movie.

PRESENT and PAST CONTINUOUS (PROGRESSIVE)

Passive form:

am/is/are + being + past participle

was/were + being + past participle

Active: Present Continuous

June is helping Su and Ling.

Passive: Present Continuous

Su and Ling are being helped by June.

Active: Past Continuous

Susan was cleaning the kitchen and patio.

Passive: Past Continuous

The kitchen and patio were being cleaned by Susan.

active and passive tenses chart

PRESENT PERFECT, PAST PERFECT and FUTURE PERFECT

Passive form:

have/has been + past participle

had been + past participle

Active: Present Perfect

Jack has sent the gifts.

Passive: Present Perfect

The gifts have been sent by Jack.

Active: Past Perfect

Steven Spielberg had directed the movie.

Passive: Past Perfect

The movie had been directed by Steven Spielberg.

Active: Future Perfect

John will have finished the project next month.

Passive: Future Perfect

The project will have been finished by next month.

active and passive tenses chart

FUTURE TENSES

Passive forms: will + be + past participle
is/are going to be + past participle

Active: Future with WILL

I will mail the gift.
Jack will mail the gifts.

Passive: Future with WILL

The gift will be mailed by me.
The gifts will be mailed by Jack.

Active: Future with GOING TO

I am going to make the cake.
Sue is going to make two cakes.

Passive: Future with GOING TO

The cake is going to be made by me.
Two cakes are going to be made by
Sue.

active and passive tenses chart

PRESENT / FUTURE MODALS

The passive form follows this pattern:
modal + be + past participle

Active: WILL / WON'T (WILL NOT)

Sharon will invite Tom to the party.

Active: CAN / CAN'T (CAN NOT)

Mai can foretell the future.

Active: MAY / MAY NOT

Her company may give Katya a new office.

MIGHT / MIGHT NOT

The lazy students might not do the homework.

Active: SHOULD / SHOULDN'T

Students should memorize English verbs.

Active: OUGHT TO

Students ought to learn English verbs.

Active: HAD BETTER / HAD BETTER NOT

Students had better practice English every day.

Active: MUST / MUST NOT

Customers must not use that door.

Active: HAS TO / HAVE TO

Sara and Miho have to wash the dishes every day.

DOESN'T HAVE TO/ DON'T HAVE TO

The children don't have to clean their bedrooms every day.

Active: BE SUPPOSED TO

Janet is supposed to clean the living room.

They aren't supposed to make desserts.

Passive: WILL / WON'T (WILL NOT)

Tom will be invited to the party by Sharon.

Passive: CAN / CAN'T (CAN NOT)

The future can be foretold by Mai.

Passive: MAY / MAY NOT

Katya may be given a new office by her company.

MIGHT / MIGHT NOT

The homework might not be done by the lazy students.

Passive: SHOULD / SHOULDN'T

English verbs should be memorized by students.

Passive: OUGHT TO

English verbs ought to be memorized by students.

Passive: HAD BETTER / HAD BETTER NOT

English had better be practiced every day by students.

Passive: MUST / MUST NOT

That door must not be used by customers.

Passive: HAS TO / HAVE TO

The dishes have to be washed by Sara and Miho every day.

DOESN'T HAVE TO/ DON'T HAVE TO

Their bedrooms don't have to be cleaned every day.

Passive: BE SUPPOSED TO

The living room is supposed to be cleaned by Janet.

Desserts aren't supposed to be made by them.

active and passive tenses chart

PAST MODALS

The past passive form follows this pattern:
modal + have been + past participle

Active: SHOULD HAVE / SHOULDN'T HAVE

The students should have learned the verbs.
The children shouldn't have broken the window.

Active: OUGHT TO

Students ought to have learned the verbs.

Active: BE SUPPOSED TO (past time)

I was supposed to type the composition.
Frank and Jane were supposed to make dinner.

Active: MAY / MAY NOT

That firm may have offered Katya a new job.

MIGHT / MIGHT NOT

That firm might have offered Katya a new job.

Passive: SHOULD HAVE / SHOULDN'T HAVE

The verbs should have been learned by the students.
The window shouldn't have been broken by the children.

Passive: OUGHT TO

The verbs ought to have been learned by the students.

Passive: BE SUPPOSED TO (past time)

The composition was supposed to be typed by me.
Dinner was supposed to be made by them.

Passive: MAY / MAY NOT

Katya may have been offered a new job by that firm.

MIGHT / MIGHT NOT

Katya might have been offered a new job by that firm.