

PASSIVE VOICE

Uses:

- Only verbs with an object (transitive) can be made passive (and even then, not all of them – e.g. like, love).

They sent the letter. *The letter **was sent**.*

- Verbs with both direct and indirect objects can be made passive in two ways:

They sent me the letter. ***I was sent** the letter*
***The letter was sent** to me.*

Contexts:

- By placing the object at the beginning of the sentence, the passive can change the focus of interest in a sentence and is used in a variety of contexts.

Impersonal statements *Students **are asked** not to smoke.*

When the agent is unknown *My bike **has been stolen**.*

When the agent is obvious *Mr. Jones **will be arrested**.*

How something was done *The box **was opened with a knife**.*

Reporting verbs

- The passive is often used with *say, believe, understand, know* and similar verbs used in reporting to avoid an impersonal *they* or *people*.

*John Wilson **is said to live** in New York.*

*John Wilson **is said to be travelling** in Africa.*

- If some misfortunes, caused by an unspecified person, happen to us, we use *to have/get something done*.

*Peter **had** his car **stolen** last week.*

- There is also an idiomatic way of expressing some passive sentences, usually about things or people which need some kind of service – *needs doing*.

*The floor is filthy. It **needs scrubbing**.*

- If a verb is followed by a preposition and object, the preposition stays with the verb in a passive sentence.

*The Prime Minister **was shouted at** during his speech.*