

Passive 1

A Form

- To make the passive we use *to be* and a past participle:

Active

Intel **produces** millions of chips every year.
Our supplier **is shipping** the goods next week.
The government **raised** interest rates by 1%.
He **was asking** me some difficult questions.
They **have chosen** the new design.
Rosa **will give** a press briefing tomorrow.
We **can arrange** a loan within six days.
We **may give** you some new sales targets.

Passive

Millions of chips **are produced** every year.
The goods **are being shipped** next week.
Interest rates **were raised** by 1%.
I **was being asked** some difficult questions.
The new design **has been chosen**.
A press briefing **will be given** tomorrow.
A loan **can be arranged** within six days.
You **may be given** some new sales targets.

- The object in the active sentence (*millions of chips/interest rates*) moves to the front in the passive sentence and becomes the subject.
- We form negatives and questions in the same way as in active sentences:
*The new design, **hasn't been chosen**. **Has** the new design **been chosen**?*

B Uses: focus on important information

- In the active sentences above the person or organisation who does the action (*Intel/The government/Rosa*) is important.
- In the passive sentences above the person or organisation who does the action is not mentioned. It might be:
 - unimportant
 - clear from the situation
 - unknownInstead, the important information is either the actions (*raised/chosen*) or the things affected by the action (*Millions of chips/The goods/A press briefing*).
- Study these examples:
A very large proportion of world oil production is generated in the Middle East. (Gulf Business Magazine website.)
Here the writer wants to emphasise the amount of oil. Who did the action (*generate*) is clear or not important.
The North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) was established in 1993 to link the United States, Canada and Mexico in a free trade agreement. (Latin Trade website)
Here the writer wants to say when and why the action happened. Who did the action (*establish*) is not important.
Deutsche Post AG will offer investors share price discounts and bonus shares as part of its planned initial public offering. These incentives will be offered to retail investors in EU countries who make an early subscription. (Wall Street Journal Europe website)
Here the writer wants to give information about the incentives. Who will do the action (*offer*) is not important or not known.

C Uses: systems and processes

- We often use the passive to talk about systems, processes and procedures:

*The barley used to make malt whisky takes about seven months to grow in the field. In August the barley **is harvested** and then **left** to rest for a couple of months. The next step is 'malting', an ancient chemistry full of tradition. It gives a rich, warm flavour to the whisky and causes the grain to produce starches, which **are converted** to sugars at a later stage of the process. The malted barley **is rested** for about three weeks then **ground** into flour and **placed** into huge vessels where it **is mixed** with hot water to make a 'wort'. The wort **is cooled**, then **run** into another vessel. Here, yeast **is added**, and the starch is turned into sugars, producing a clear liquid called 'the wash'. It is distillation that turns this wash into whisky. In distilling, the liquid **is heated** until the spirit turns to vapour, then condensed back into liquid. By law, Scotch whisky **must be aged** in oak barrels for at least three years. (Adapted from Dewar's Scotch Whisky website)*

- To show a sequence in a process we use words like: *Firstly/First of all, Then, The next step, Next, After that, Finally*.
First of all the finished products **are checked** for quality, **then they are packed and sent out** from our warehouse. **After dispatch** we allow customers to follow the progress of their order on our Intranet. **Finally**, we get a digital image of the signature of the person who receives the goods, so that this **can be checked** later, if necessary.

D Saying who does the action

- In all the passive examples above the person or organisation that does the action is not mentioned. If we want to say who does the action then we use *by*:
*The goods are being shipped next week **by our supplier in China**.*
*A press briefing will be given tomorrow **by our Information Officer, Rosa Mendoza**.*
*The factory is staffed **by the local people who worked there before**, but on a completely different basis.* (Business News Americas website)

E Transitive and intransitive verbs

- Verbs which usually take objects are called transitive verbs (eg: *help*). Verbs which do not usually take objects are called intransitive verbs (eg: *look*).
A: Can I **help** you?
B: No, I'm just **looking**.
Dictionaries show this information with T or I. Some verbs can be both transitive and intransitive. Only transitive verbs can be made passive.
Raise (T) Interest rates were raised last month. possible
Increase (T/I) Interest rates were increased last month. possible
Go up (I) Interest rates ~~were gone up~~ last month. not possible

9 Practice

Exercise 1 A

Complete each sentence with a passive verb. You may need a negative form.

- Somebody damaged the goods in transit.
The goods were damaged in transit.
- Thousands of people see this advert every day.
This advert by thousands of people every day.
- They will not finish the project by the end of the month.
The project by the end of the month.
- They have closed fifty retail outlets over the last year.
Fifty retail outlets over the last year.
- We are reviewing all of our IT systems.
All of our IT systems
- We cannot ship your order until we receive payment.
Your order until we receive payment.

Exercise 2 B D

Decide if it is necessary to say who does the action. If it is not necessary, cross it out. If it is necessary, put a tick (✓).

- I don't think your proposal will be accepted ~~by people~~.
- The company was founded by the father of the present chairman. ✓
- All our machines are serviced by highly trained technicians.
- This machine isn't working again! It was repaired yesterday by a technician.
- The conference was opened by someone from the London Business School.
- I'll be shown round the factory by someone, and then I'll meet the sales team.

Exercise 3 A B D E

Rewrite these sentences using the passive if it is possible. You may need a negative form. If it is not possible (because the verb is intransitive) put a cross X.

- Our R & D department have discovered a promising new drug.
A promising new drug has been discovered by our R+D department
- The inflation rate went down by 0.5% last month.
X
- One of our best young designers created this line.
.....
- I'm sorry, we can't do that.
.....
- Something very interesting happened to me last week.
.....
- We're spending more than a million dollars on advertising this year.
.....
- The Accounts Department may not authorise this payment.
.....
- I worked as a consultant for four years after my MBA.
.....

Exercise 4 A B C

A marketing manager is writing a training manual that explains how the company uses questionnaires to do market research. Complete the text by putting the verbs from the list below into the present simple passive.

~~design~~ send back distribute offer put outsource analyse

First, we carefully select a sample of people to ask. Then the questions (1) are designed by a small team within the department. Next, the questions (2) into sequence and grouped together by topic. After that, we print the questionnaire and it (3) to everyone in the sample. Of course, not all the forms (4) to us, but we try to collect as many as possible.

Sometimes a small gift (5) to people who return the forms, as an incentive. Finally we enter all the results onto a spreadsheet, and the information (6) by the marketing department. If we are using a very large sample the distribution and collection (7) to an external company.

Exercise 5 A B

Helen is starting her own business. Look at the extract from her planning schedule, then complete her letter to a business advice service. Choose either the present perfect passive (*has/have been done*), present continuous passive (*is/are being done*) or a modal passive form (eg: *should be done*).

Contact bank to arrange loan.	✓
Find office space.	✓
Equipment needed? Order if necessary.	<i>In progress</i>
Print business cards, stationery, etc.	<i>In progress</i>
Decorate office, order furniture, etc.	<i>Finish end of month</i>
Place advertisements in local press.	✓
Review staffing needs for Christmas period.	<i>November</i>

Dear Sir or Madam

I am writing to arrange an interview with one of your business advisers to discuss my business start-up. I've analysed the market very carefully and I believe that I have a good business plan. I can give you a few details of my progress so far.

I've had several meetings with my bank, and a loan (1) has been arranged (arrange). I've found some office space in a good location, although some work (2) (will / need) there before I can move in. I've reviewed my equipment needs and in fact some specialised items (3) (order) at the moment. My business cards (4) (print) and will be ready in a week or so. This week I'm busy decorating the office, and I (5) (should / finish) by the end of the month.

I know that soon I'll have to advertise in the local press, and perhaps you could advise me on this matter. Finally, I'd like some help planning my staffing needs – extra staff (6) (might / need) over the Christmas period.

Yours faithfully

Helen Chadwick

Passive 2

A Uses: linking to previous information

The choice of active or passive often depends on how we want to continue from the previous sentence:

(Hasso Plattner) is one of Germany's best known businessmen. (He) founded SAP in 1972 after working for IBM. (active)

(SAP) is a world leader in business software. (It) was founded by Hasso Plattner in 1972 after he left IBM. (passive)

B Uses: being formal/impersonal

The passive is often used in business correspondence where the writer wants to be impersonal. Compare:

ACTIVE more personal

We ordered twenty filter units from you on the 16th March and the courier delivered them yesterday. Unfortunately, when we opened the package someone had damaged two of the units. Our production department needs these items urgently.

PASSIVE more impersonal

Twenty filter units were ordered from you on the 16th March and they were delivered yesterday. Unfortunately, when the package was opened two of the units had been damaged. These items are needed urgently by our production department.

Passives are frequent in formal writing generally, eg: reports and legal documents. Other language in the text will also be formal:

Contract of Employment

(i) Offer of employment. The offer may be expressed directly or it may be implied by conduct. It must be communicated to the employee. The offer can be withdrawn at any time before acceptance.

(ii) Written Conditions. After the contract is made, every employee must be given a written statement of terms and conditions of employment. (Business Link website)

Passives are used in phrases with *it* to report what people said in a formal way: *It was said/agreed that ...*

Try to find a balance between active and passive forms. Too many passive forms can make a letter or report difficult to understand.

C Passive + infinitive

- The verbs *believe, expect, know, report, say, think, suppose, understand* are often used in the present simple passive followed by an infinitive (*to do*). This use is common in news reports:

The Hungarian economy is expected to expand 6% over the next two years as rising demand across Europe boosts demand for locally produced cars and refrigerators. Consumer prices are predicted to rise by an annual average of 7% next year. (cebd website)

- To refer to the past we use *believe, expect, etc* with *to have done*.

Many investment banks are believed to have suffered losses in the high yield, or 'junk', bond market in recent months. (FT.com website)

- To refer to an activity in progress at the moment we use *believe, expect, etc* with *to be doing*.

Ericsson is known to be looking at the possibility of outsourcing its low price, entry-level phones in Taiwan. (Economist website)

D Verbs with two objects

- Some verbs have two objects. We can:
give/lend/offer/promise/sell/send/take something to somebody
book/buy/keep/make/prepare/save something for somebody

- In active sentences we can use these verbs in two ways:

ABB gave a large order to us last year. (with to)

ABB gave us a large order last year. (without to)

The form without *to/for* is more usual.

- Each way can be made passive. One of the objects becomes the subject of the passive sentence, the other stays as an object.

A large order was given to us by ABB last year. (with to)

We were given a large order by ABB last year. (without to)

Again, the form without *to/for* is more usual.

E Have something done

- When a professional person, eg, a technician or accountant, does some work for us, we can use *have something done*:

We have our accounts audited by KPMG.

We had our offices redecorated last year.

We're going to have a new air conditioning system installed.

You must have your computers checked for viruses.

- We can use *get* in place of *have* in most cases. This is more informal.

We got the contract checked by our lawyers.

F To be born

- To be born* is a passive form but does not have an obvious passive meaning.

I was born in Uruguay.

10 Practice

Exercise 1 A

Read each statement 1–5 then choose which sentence a) or b) should follow. Put a tick (✓) by the correct answer.

- 1 Chevron and Texaco are going to merge via a \$36 billion offer by Chevron.
 - a) Senior executives first discussed it a year ago.
 - b) It was first discussed by senior executives a year ago.
- 2 The process of economic union in Europe is progressing quickly.
 - a) A commissioner from Spain called Pedro Solbes is directing it.
 - b) It is being directed by Pedro Solbes, a commissioner from Spain.
- 3 Pedro Solbes is Europe's commissioner for economic and monetary affairs.
 - a) He is directing the difficult process of economic union.
 - b) The difficult process of economic union is being directed by him.
- 4 Novartis shares rose by 32 Swiss francs in Zurich yesterday.
 - a) They are going to launch a new drug called Starlix later this year.
 - b) A new drug called Starlix is going to be launched by them later this year.
- 5 Starlix is a powerful new drug for treating diabetes.
 - a) Novartis are going to launch it later this year.
 - b) It is going to be launched by Novartis later this year.

Exercise 2 C E F

Underline the correct words.

- 1 I had my car be repaired/ repaired yesterday.
- 2 Profits are expected grow/ to grow by 10% in the next quarter.
- 3 I was born/ born in a little town just outside Dijon.
- 4 We're getting the machines cleaned/ to be cleaned tomorrow.
- 5 The Board is thought to be demanded/ have demanded his resignation.
- 6 We have the components assembling/ assembled in Taiwan.
- 7 Where exactly were you born/ did you born?
- 8 She is supposed to been looking/ to be looking for a new job.

Exercise 3 D

Complete the second sentence so it has a similar meaning to the first sentence.

- 1 David Gill from Marketing lent me this book.
..... I was lent this book by David Gill from Marketing.
- 2 This sample was given to me at the Trade Fair.
..... this sample at the Trade Fair.
- 3 They promised us delivery within two weeks of our order.
We within two weeks of our order.
- 4 A textile firm near Milan made this fabric for us.
..... for us by a textile firm near Milan.
- 5 This order was sent to us through our website.
..... this order through our website.
- 6 My secretary booked the flight for me.
..... for me by my secretary.

Exercise 4 B

- 16 Complete the report by putting the verbs in brackets into the present perfect active (*has done*) or passive (*has been done*).

Investment opportunities:

Brazil

Brazil (1) has been transformed (transform) from an economy based on sugar and coffee into a leading industrial power, and this (2) has happened (happen) over a relatively short time period. Over recent years inflation (3) (bring) under control, and foreign direct investment (4) (encourage). The Government (5) (privatise) many state-owned companies, and they (6) (also / invest) a lot of money in advanced infrastructure. In an attempt to decentralise the economy, Campinas was chosen to be Brazil's IT capital, and car production (7) (move) away from traditional centres to states such as Rio Grande do Sul in the south. No one pretends that all the old problems (8) (solve), but Brazil is finally taking its place on the world stage.

Exercise 5 C

- 17 Read the article about Manchester United, then complete it with the verbs in the brackets. Put the first verb in the present simple passive (*to be done*) and the second verb in a suitable form of the infinitive (*to do, to be doing, or to have done*).

Manchester United: just a game of football?

Manchester United is

(1) is supposed to have (suppose/have) between 10 million and 30 million supporters throughout the world. In Norway, for example, one in every 140 people (2) (say/be) a registered supporter. Ticket sales and merchandising contribute over half of the club's revenue, with television contributing a further 20%.

But senior executives

(3) (know/look at) other ways to generate income at the moment. For example, the club (4) (believe/develop) e-commerce initiatives through a series of alliances. Costs at the club continue to increase. A few years ago the club (5) (report/spend) £30m on a plan to expand

the capacity of the stadium from 55,000

seats to 67,400 seats. But this (6) (think/be) a good investment as it will generate nearly £7.5 million in additional turnover annually. The main costs at the club are the salaries of the players. Last year the team's captain (7) (understand/negotiate) a four-year contract worth over eight figures.

Exercise 6 B

The two emails below are very similar, but the one on the right is more impersonal. Complete it by using verbs from the first email in the correct form of the passive.

Thank you for your order for PCplus software which we received this morning. Our fulfillment team is dealing with your order, and we expect that we will deliver the package to you within 10 working days. I have included our current price list as an attachment. Please note we only guarantee these prices until 31 December. Thank you for choosing soft.com.

Thank you for your order for PCplus software which (1) was received this morning. Your order (2) by our fulfillment team and we expect that the package (3) to you within 10 working days. Our current price list (4) as an attachment. Please note that these prices (5) until 31 December. Thank you for choosing soft.com.