

## THE PASSIVE (1)

(Source: Vince, M., Sunderland, P.: *Advanced Language Practice*)

### THEORY

## Explanations

### Basic uses of the passive

- Agent and instrument  
The person who performs an action in a passive sentence is called the agent, introduced by *by*. The agent may or may not be mentioned.  
*My purse was found by one of the cleaners.*  
*A new road has been built.*  
An object which causes something to happen is called an instrument, introduced by *with*.  
*He was hit on the head with a hammer.*
- Verbs with two objects  
Verbs which have two objects can be made passive in two ways.  
*I was handed a note. A note was handed to me.*  
Other common verbs of this type are:  
*bring, give, lend, pass, pay, promise, sell, send, show, tell*
- Verbs with object and complement  
Some verbs have a noun or adjective which describes their object.  
*We elected Jim class representative.*  
*Everyone considered him a failure.*  
When these are made passive, the complement goes directly after the verb.  
*Jim was elected class representative.*  
*He was considered a failure.*
- Verbs which can't be passive  
Most verbs with an object (transitive verbs) can be made passive:  
e.g. *drive* is transitive because one can drive **something** (a car).  
However, a few transitive verbs may not be used in the passive. These include: *become, fit* (be the right size), *get, have, lack, let, like, resemble, suit*.  
Verbs with no object (intransitive) can not be passive:  
e.g. *fall* is intransitive, you cannot 'fall something'.  
Therefore it is not possible to say 'The tree was fallen'. Instead the sentence must be active: *The tree fell.*

### Using and not mentioning the agent

- Change of focus  
The passive can change the emphasis of a sentence.  
*Jack won the prize, (focus on Jack)*  
*The prize was won by Jack, (focus on the prize)*

- **Unknown agent**  
The agent is not mentioned if unknown.  
*My wallet has been taken.*  
In this case, there is no point in adding an agent: 'by somebody'.
- **Generalised agent**  
If the subject is 'people in general' or 'you' the agent is not mentioned.  
*Bicycles are widely used in the city instead of public transport.*
- **Obvious agent**  
If the agent is obvious or has already been referred to, it is not mentioned.  
*Linda has been arrested!* (we assume by the police)  
*The company agreed to our request and a new car park was opened.*
- **Unimportant agent**  
If the agent is not important to the meaning of the sentence it is not mentioned.  
*I was advised to obtain a visa in advance.*
- **Impersonality**  
Using the passive is a way of avoiding the naming of a specific person who is responsible for an action.  
*It has been decided to reduce all salaries by 10%.*  
In descriptions of processes, there is emphasis on the actions performed rather than on the people who perform them.  
*Then the packets are packed into boxes of twenty-four.*

## PRACTICE

### Practice

Correct any verb forms which are impossible or inappropriate.

- a) A lot of homes in the area have been being broken into by burglars.  
have been broken into
  - b) As I drove south, I could see that the old road was rebuilding.
  - c) I suppose the letter will have been delivered by now.....
  - d) There is nothing more annoying than been interrupted when you are speaking.....
  - e) Jim was been given the sack from his new job.....
  - f) Somehow without my noticing my wallet had been disappeared.
  - g) The new shopping centre was opened by the local MR .....
  - h) A lot of meetings have been held, but nothing has being decided yet.
- 2 Both sentences in each pair have the same meaning. Complete the second sentence.
- a) The crowd was slowly filling the huge stadium.  
The huge stadium was slowly being filled by the crowd.
  - b) The inventor of the computer simplified the work of the accountants.  
Since the computer.....,.....the work of accountants  
.....simplified.
  - c) Someone has suggested that the shop should close.  
It.....that the shop should close.
  - d) 'I'd take out some travel insurance if I were you, Mr Smith.'  
Mr Smith.....take out some travel insurance.
  - e) The waitress will bring your drinks in a moment.  
Your drinks .....in a moment.
  - f) Someone used a knife to open the window.  
This window.....a knife.
  - g) You will hear from us when we have finished dealing with your complaint.  
After your complaint..... you will hear from us.
  - h) An announcement of their engagement appeared in the local paper.  
Their engagement.....in the local paper.
  - i) Nobody ever heard anything of David again.  
Nothing.....David again.
  - j) They paid Sheila £1,000 as a special bonus.  
£1,000.....Sheila as a special bonus.

- 3 Rewrite each sentence in the passive, omitting the words underlined.
- Someone left the phone off the hook all night.  
*The phone was left off the hook all night.*
  - The government has announced that petrol prices will rise tomorrow.
  - A burglar broke into our house last week.
  - People asked me the way three times.
  - The fruit-pickers pick the apples early in the morning.
  - It's time the authorities did something about this problem.
  - Lots of people had parked their cars on the pavement.
  - The government agreed with the report and so they changed the law.
  - You have to fill in an application form.
  - They don't know what happened to the ship.
- 4 Put each verb in brackets into an appropriate passive verb form.
- The boxes *have not been packed* (not/pack) yet.
  - Your food.....(still/prepare).
  - The new ship.....(launch) next week.
  - Luckily by the time we got there the painting.....  
(not/sell).
  - We had to go on holiday because our house.....  
(decorate).
  - I'm afraid that next week's meeting.....(cancel).
  - If we don't hurry, all the tickets.....(sell) by the  
time we get there.
  - All main courses.....(serve) with vegetables or  
salad. At least that is what is written on the menu.
  - The second goal.....(score) by Hughes in the 41st  
minute.
  - The cathedral.....(build) in the fourteenth century.

5 Underline any uses of the agent which are unnecessary.

- a) My jewellery has been stolen by a thief!
- b) It has been decided by the authorities that Wednesday will be a school holiday.
- c) Harry was pushed over by someone standing next to him in the queue.
- d) The goods are transported by rail to our warehouse in the Midlands.
- e) I was told by someone that you have a vacancy for a computer operator.
- f) Sue has been picked by the selectors for the national event.
- g) The letter was sent by post on the 21st of last month.
- h) The larger portrait was painted by a little-known Flemish artist.
- i) It has been agreed by everyone that no smoking should be allowed.
- j) As I arrived at the conference a note was handed to me by one of the delegates.

6 Put each verb in brackets into an appropriate passive verb form.

- a) Nothing has been seen..... (see) of Pauline since her car  
.....(find) abandoned near Newbury last week.
- b) As our new furniture..... (deliver) on Monday  
morning I'll have to stay at home to check that it  
.....(not/damage) during transit.
- c) The new Alhambra hatchback, which in this country  
.....(sell) under the name 'Challenger',  
.....(fit) with electric windows as standard.
- d) For the past few days I..... (work) in Jack's office, as  
my own office.....(redecorate).
- e) It.....(announce) that the proposed new office  
block.....(now/not/build) because of the current  
economic situation.
- f) A major new deposit of oil.....(discover) in the  
North Sea. It..... (think) to be nearly twice the size  
of the largest existing field.
- g) Pictures of the surface of the planet Venus.....  
(receive) yesterday from the space probe 'Explorer' which  
.....(launch) last year.
- h) A large sum.....(raise) for the Fund by a recent  
charity concert but the target of £250,000.....(still/  
not/reach),
- i) No decision.....(make) about any future  
appointment until all suitable candidates.....  
(interview).

Rewrite each sentence in a more formal style so that it contains a passive form of the word given in capitals.

- a) Sorry, but we've lost your letter. MISLAY  
*Unfortunately your letter has been mislaid.*
- b) The police are grilling Harry down at the station. QUESTION
- c) They've found the remains of an old Roman villa nearby. DISCOVER
- d) You'll get a rise in salary after six months. RAISE
- e) They stopped playing the match after half an hour. ABANDON
- f) They stopped traffic from using the centre. BAN
- g) They took Chris to court for dangerous driving. PROSECUTE
- h) You usually eat this kind of fish with a white sauce. SERVE
- i) I don't know your name. INTRODUCE

- o Put each verb in brackets into a suitable active or passive verb form.

Dear Mrs Patel,

We are delighted to inform you that you (1) *have been selected* (select) for a free holiday. According to our information, you (2).....(answer) a telephone survey last month, as a result of which your name (3).....(enter) in the holiday draw. Now our computer (4).....(choose) your name, so you and your family (5).....(invite) to spend a week in a European destination of your choice. This offer (6).....(make) on the condition that you attend a special promotions day with other lucky families in your region who (7).....(offer) a similar deal. You (8).....(ask) to attend on any Saturday next month at the Royal Hotel, Manchester. If you (9).....(interest) in attending and taking up this offer, please (10).....(detach) the slip below and return it to us as soon as possible.

- 9 Using the notes as a guide, complete the e-mail to all company staff. Put the verbs in brackets into a suitable passive verb form.

NOTES FROM MANAGEMENT MEETING

Tell staff:

We'll try flexi-time for 3 months.

After 3 months we'll get the opinions of all staff.

We'll look at feedback comments and make a decision.

We may try it for another month.

All workers will have to arrive 8-9.30.

We hope you like the idea!

FROM: The Managing Director

TO: All staff

*has been decided*..... (decide) to adopt a flexi-time system for a trial period of three months. After this period (2)..... (elapse) all members of staff (3).....(consult) through their line manager, and feedback (4).....(seek). Comments (5).....(collect) and analysed before a decision (6).....(make) as to whether the system (7).....(adopt) permanently or not. Alternatively, the trial period (8).....(extend) for a further month. All employees (9).....(require) to arrive between the hours of 8.00 and 9.30, and to leave after they have fulfilled their contractual obligations of eight hours. It (10).....(hope) that this arrangement meets with your enthusiastic approval!



→ SEE ALSO  
**Grammar 7: Passive 2**  
**Grammar 10: Consolidation 2**

## KEY

### (Grammar 6)

- 8 a) correct  
b) rented, went  
c) correct  
d) correct  
e) explored, went  
f) built  
g) correct  
h) finds  
i) tastes really

#### Grammar 6

- 1 a) *have been broken into*  
b) was being rebuilt  
c) correct  
d) being interrupted  
e) was given/has been given  
f) had/has disappeared/  
disappeared  
g) correct  
h) has been decided
- 2 a) *was slowly being filled*  
b) was invented/has been  
c) has been suggested  
d) was advised to  
e) will be brought (to you)  
f) was opened with  
g) has been dealt with  
h) was announced  
i) was ever heard of  
j) was paid to
- 3 a) *The phone was left off the  
hook all night.*  
b) It has been announced that  
petrol prices will rise  
tomorrow.  
c) Our house was broken into  
last week.  
d) I was asked the way three  
times.  
e) The apples are picked early  
in the morning.  
f) It's time something was  
done about this problem.  
g) Lots of cars had been  
parked on the pavement.  
h) The government agreed  
with the report and so the  
law was changed.  
i) An application form has to  
be filled in.  
j) It is not known what  
happened to the ship.
- 4 a) *have not been packed*  
b) is still being prepared  
c) will be launched/is being  
launched  
d) had not been sold  
e) was being decorated  
f) has been cancelled/is  
cancelled  
g) will have been sold/will be  
sold  
h) are served  
i) was scored  
j) was built
- 5 a) *by a thief*  
b) by the authorities  
c) by someone standing next  
to him  
e) by someone  
f) by the selectors  
g) by post  
i) by everyone  
j) by one of the delegates
- 6 a) *has been seen, was found*  
b) is being/is going to be  
delivered, has not been/was  
not damaged  
c) is (being) sold, is fitted  
d) have been working, is being  
redecorated  
e) has been announced, will  
now not be built  
f) has been discovered, is  
thought  
g) were received, was launched  
h) was raised, has still not  
been reached  
i) will be made, have been  
interviewed
- 7 a) *Unfortunately your letter has  
been mislaid.*  
b) Harry is being questioned at  
the police station.  
c) The remains of an old  
Roman villa have been  
discovered nearby.  
d) After six months your salary  
will be raised.  
e) The match was abandoned  
after half an hour.  
f) Traffic was banned from  
(using) the centre.  
g) Chris was prosecuted for  
dangerous driving.  
h) This fish is usually served  
with a white sauce.  
i) We have not been  
introduced.
- 8 1) *have been selected*  
2) answered  
3) was entered  
4) has chosen  
5) are invited  
6) is made  
7) have been offered  
8) are asked  
9) are interested  
10) detach  
  
*has been decided*  
2) elapses/has elapsed  
3) will be consulted  
4) will be sought  
5) will be collected  
6) is made  
7) will/should be adopted  
8) will/may be extended  
9) are/will be required  
10) is hoped

#### Grammar 7

- 1 \*) Different. Same would be:  
I've just had my hair cut.  
b) Different. Same would be:  
We are having our house  
painted.  
Same  
d) Same  
e) Same  
f) Different. Same would be:  
I'll have this wrapped for  
you/I'll have someone wrap  
this for you.  
Same  
\*) Different. Same would be:  
We're having a new water-  
heater put in next week.  
i) Same  
j) Different. Same would be:  
We had the wiring checked  
by a qualified electrician.
- 2 a) *with*  
b) *by*  
c) *in*  
d) *by*  
e) *with*  
f) *by*  
g) *by*  
h) *with*  
with  
j) *with*