

Passive voice

Explanations

1- Transitive and intransitive

Only verbs with an object (transitive) can be made passive.

The sent the letter ⇒the letter **was sent**.

They arrive (cannot be made passive)

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.

2- Like and love

Some verbs which are transitive cannot be made passive in some uses.

I like this place (a passive form of this sentence would not be made acceptable)

3- Contexts

By placing the object at the beginning of the sentence, the passive can change the focus of interest in a sentence.

United were beaten by Arsenal (We are more interested in United)

The passive is used in a variety of contexts.

Impersonal statements ⇒ students **are asked** not to cheat.

When the agent is unknown ⇒ my phone **has been stolen!**

(This avoids using someone or they)

When the agent is obvious. ⇒ This gang member **will be arrested**.

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

Reporting verbs

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

People say that she lives in New York City. ⇒ She **is said to live** in New York City.

2- The past tense and continuous verbs can also be reported in this way.

She is said **to be travelling** around the world.

She is said **to have landed** in Bangkok.

To have or get something done

- 1- Causative have describes services done for us by someone else.

Tomorrow I'll **have** money **transferred** to my bank account.

- 2- The same construction can describe misfortunes which happen to us, caused by an unspecified person.

She **had** her phone **stolen** last week. And then she **had** her wrist **broken** playing volley-ball.

- 3- Using *get* instead of *have* can suggest managing to do something.

It was quite difficult but we **got** it **done** in the end.

Needs doing

This is an idiomatic way of expressing some passive sentences, usually about things or people which need some kind of service.

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

Verbs and prepositions

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

The crowd shouted at the Prime Minister during her speech.

The Prime minister **was shouted** at during her speech.

Other problems

- 1- A passive form in one language is not necessarily translated by a passive form in another.

I **was born** in France

- 2- Make (when meaning force) is followed by to in the passive. The agent is not always included when he/she/it is unknown or obvious.

They made her work harder ⇒ She **was made to work** harder.