

THE PASSIVE VOICE

FORM

The passive of an active tense is formed by putting the verb to be into the same tense as the active verb and adding the past participle of the active verb. The subject of the active verb becomes the 'agent' of the passive verb. The agent is very often not mentioned. When it is mentioned it is preceded by by and placed at the end of the clause:

Active We keep the butter here. Passive The butter is kept here.

Active They broke the window. Passive The window was broken.

Active People have seen wolves in the streets. Passive Wolves have been seen in the streets.

Active They are repairing the bridge. Passive The bridge is being repaired.

Active They were carrying the injured player off the field. Passive The injured player was being carried off the field.

Active You must/should shut these doors. Passive These doors must/should be shut.

Active They should/ought to have told him. Passive He should/ought to have been told.

Verbs of liking/loving/wanting/wishing etc. + object + infinitive form their passive with the passive infinitive:

Active *He wants someone to take photographs.* Passive *He wants photographs to be taken.*

With verbs of command/request/advice/invitation + indirect object + infinitive we form the passive by using the passive form of the main verb:

Active *He invited me to go.* Passive *I was invited to go.*

But with advise/beg/order/recommend/urge + indirect object + infinitive + object we can form the passive in two ways: by making the main verb passive, as above, or by advise etc. + that, should + passive infinitive:

Active *He urged the Council to reduce the rates.* Passive *The Council was/were urged to reduce the rates* or *He urged that the rates should be reduced.*

agree/be anxious/arrange/be determined/determine/decide/demand + infinitive + object are usually expressed in the passive by that. . . should, as above:

Active *He decided to sell the house.* Passive *He decided that the house should be sold.*

advise/insist/propose/recommend/suggest + gerund + object are usually expressed in the passive by that. . . should, as above:

Active *He recommended using bullet-proof glass.*

Passive *He recommended that bullet-proof glass should be used.*

Tense/Verb form	Active voice	Passive voice
Simple present	keeps	is kept
Present continuous	is keeping	is being kept
Simple past	kept	was kept
Past continuous	was keeping	was being kept
Present perfect	has kept	has been kept
Past perfect	had kept	had been kept
Future	would keep	will be kept
Conditional	will keep	would be kept

Perfect conditional	would have kept	would have been kept
Present infinitive	to keep to	be kept
Perfect infinitive	to have kept	to have been kept
Present participle	having kept	being kept
Perfect participle	keeping	having been kept

PREPOSITIONS WITH PASSIVE VERBS

As already noted, the agent, when mentioned, is preceded by by;

Active Dufy painted this picture. Passive This picture was painted by Dufy. Active

What makes these holes? Passive What are these holes made by?

Note, however, that the passive form of such sentences as:

Smoke filled the room. Paint covered the lock. will be:

The room was filled with smoke. The lock was covered with paint. We are dealing here with materials used, not with the agents.

When a verb + preposition 4- object combination is put into the passive, the preposition will remain immediately after the verb;

Active We must write to him.

Passive He must be written to.

Active You can play with these cubs quite safely.

Passive These cubs can be played with quite safely.

Similarly with verb + preposition/adverb combinations:

Active They threw away the old newspapers.

Passive The old newspapers were thrown away.

Active He looked after the children well.

Exercise 1 : Put the following into the passive voice. Dont mention the agent

1 You should open the wine about three hours before you use it.

2 Previous climbers had cut steps in the ice.

3 Somebody had cleaned my shoes and brushed my suit.

4 We use this room only on special occasions.

5 You must not hammer nails into the walls without permission.

6 In some districts farmers use pigs to find truffles.

7 Someone switched on a light and opened the door.

8 Somebody had slashed the picture with a knife.

9 They are pulling down the old theatre.

10 Why didn't they mend the roof before it fell in?

Exercise 2 : Put the following into the passive, mentioning the agent where necessary.

1 They feed the seals at the zoo twice a day.

2 Who wrote it?

4 He expected us to offer him the job.

5 They showed her the easiest way to do it.

6 Lightning struck the old oak.

8 A jellyfish stung her.

9 The author has written a special edition for children.

10 Judges used to carry sweet herbs as a protection against jail-fever.

11 What did he write it with? ~ He wrote it with a match stick dipped in blood.

Exercise 3 : Turn the following sentences into the active voice. Where no agent is mentioned one must be supplied.

School notice: This door must be kept shut. *Students must keep this door shut.*

1 Why don't you have your eyes tested? (. . . get an optician to . . .)

2 This speed limit is to be introduced gradually.

3 The runways are being lengthened at all the main airports.

5 Byron is said to have lived on vinegar and potatoes.

7 This notice has been altered.

9 The damaged ship was being towed into harbour when the tow-line broke.

10 Have a lift put in and then you won't have to climb up all these stairs.

Exercise 4 : Put the transitive verbs into the passive voice. Do not mention the agent unless it seems necessary.

1 The milkman brings the milk to my door but the postman leaves the letters in the hall.

2 In future, perhaps, they won't bring letters to the houses, and we shall have to collect

4 Normally men sweep this street every day, but nobody swept it last week.

5 The postman clears this box three times a day. He last cleared it at 2.30.

6 Someone turned on a light in the hall and opened the door.

8 We never saw him in the dining-room. A maid took all his meals up to him.

9 Someone left this purse in a classroom yesterday; the cleaner found it.

10 We build well over 1,000 new houses a year. Last year we built 1,500.

13 An ambulance took the sick man to hospital. (*Mention ambulance.*)

14 We kill and injure people on the roads every day. Can't we do something about this?

Exercise 5 : Put the transitive verbs into the passive voice. Do not mention the agent unless it seems necessary.

1 They haven't stamped the letter.

2 They didn't pay me for the work; they expected me to do it for nothing.

3 He escaped when they were moving him from one prison to another.

4 She didn't introduce me to her mother.

5 A frightful crash wakened me at 4 a.m.

7 They threw away the rubbish.

8 A Japanese firm makes these television sets.

9 An earthquake destroyed the town.

10 A machine could do this much more easily.

11 Visitors must leave umbrellas and sticks in the cloakroom.

Exercise 6 : In this exercise most of the sentences contain a verb + preposition/adverb combination. The preposition or adverb must be retained when the combination is put into the passive. In most of the sentences it is not necessary to mention the agent.

1 The government has called out troops.

2 Fog held up the trains, (*agent required*)

3 You are to leave this here. Someone will call for it later on.

4 We called in the police.

5 They didn't look after the children properly.

6 They are flying in reinforcements.

7 Then they called up men of 28.

8 Everyone looked up to him. (*agent required*)

9 All the ministers will see him off at the airport, (*agent required*)

10 He hasn't slept in his bed.

Exercise 7 :

Some of the following sentences when put into the passive require or can have a change of construction.

1 **believe, claim, consider, find, know, say, suppose** and **think** when used in the passive can be followed by an infinitive: They say he is a spy = *He is said to be a spy.* They say he was a spy = *He is said to have been a spy.*

2 Subject + **be supposed** + infinitive often conveys an idea of duty, particularly when the subject is **you**: It is your duty to obey him = *You are supposed to obey him.*

4 Note the use of **have** + object + past participle: Get someone to mend it = *Have it mended.*

Put the following sentences into the passive, using an infinitive construction where possible.

1 We added up the money and found that it was correct.

2 I'm employing a man to tile the bathroom.

3 Someone seems to have made a terrible mistake.

4 It is your duty to make tea at eleven o'clock. (*Use suppose.*)

5 People know that he is armed.

6 Someone saw him pick up the gun.

7 We know that you were in town on the night of the crime.

9 You needn't have done this.

10 It's a little too loose; you had better ask your tailor to take it in. (*one passive*)

11 He likes people to call him 'sir'.

12 Don't touch this switch.

13 You will have to get someone to see to it.

14 It is impossible to do this. (*Use can't.*)

15 Someone is following us.

16 They used to make little boys climb the chimneys to clean them. (*one passive*)

17 You have to see it to believe it. (*two passives*)

18 You order me about and I am tired of it. (*I am tired of. . .*)

19 He doesn't like people laughing at him.

20 You don't need to wind this watch.

21 They shouldn't have told him.

23 People believe that he was killed by terrorists.

24 They are to send letters to the leaders of charitable organizations.

26 We don't allow smoking.

27 We know that the expedition reached the South Pole in May.

28 Before they invented printing people had to write everything by hand.

29 They urged the government to create more jobs. (*two ways*)

30 They suggested banning the sale of alcohol at football matches.