

# RULES

The **active voice** is used to say what people and things do.

They **paid** the bill. (*focus on they*)

When we want to emphasise what happens to people and things, we often use the **passive voice**.

The bill **was paid**. (*focus on the bill*)

**PASSIVE FORMS** (See Appendix for passive tenses and passive modals, page 217.)

## Infinitive

to be + past participle

I didn't expect **them to contact me** so soon. (*active*)

I didn't expect **to be contacted** so soon. (*passive*)

## Perfect infinitive

to have been + past participle

I am pleased **they have invited me** to the wedding. (*active*)

I am pleased **to have been invited** to the wedding. (*passive*)

## Gerund

being + past participle

I hate **people shouting at me**. (*active*)

I hate **being shouted at**. (*passive*)

## Perfect gerund

having been + past participle

I recall Sue **having told me** the news. (*active*)

I recall **having been told** the news. (*passive*)

## Notes

1 Passive forms of Future Continuous, Future Perfect Continuous, Present Perfect Continuous and Past Perfect Continuous are not used in English. For these tenses, we use the active voice or find an alternative way of expressing the same meaning.

By the time it's finished, **they will have been building** the stadium for almost a decade.

By the time it's finished, the stadium **will have been under construction** for almost a decade.

2 Not all verbs take an object, therefore they cannot be used in the passive. Examples of such verbs include: *arrive, come, die, disappear, go, happen, have, live, occur, sleep*.

3 When using a phrasal verb or verb + preposition in the passive, don't forget the particle (adverb / preposition).

His grandmother **brought him up**.

We **think highly of** her.

→ He **was brought up** by his grandmother.

→ She is highly **thought of**.

4 When a verb has two objects, there are two possible passive forms. When the first object is a person, this usually becomes the subject of the passive. Examples of such verbs include: *give, send, show, lend, pay, tell, promise, refuse, offer, award*.

They **awarded** our company the contract.

They **gave** Julie a salary rise.

→ The contract **was awarded** to our company.

→ Julie **was given** a salary rise. (more common)

→ Our company **was awarded** the contract.

→ A salary rise **was given** to Julie. (less common)

5 The verbs *agree, believe, consider, expect, know, say, rumour, think* and *suppose* can be expressed in the passive in two ways:

• passive form + full infinitive They **say** he is a millionaire. → He **is said to be** a millionaire.

• *It* as the subject + passive + *that* + clause **It is said that** he is a millionaire.

Continuous or perfect infinitives are used with these structures to indicate tense.

I **believe she is living** in France. → She **is believed to be living** in France.

6 With verbs like *say, think* and *feel*, the passive can be used with *there* as a subject.

**There are thought to be** hundreds of new species in the rainforest. (*Scientists think there are ...*)

**There was felt to be** no reason to continue the investigation. (*They felt there was no reason ...*)

## STYLE AND USAGE

We generally omit *by* + the agent when:

- the agent is unknown
- the agent is obvious
- we refer to people in general
- the agent is not important
- we don't want to name the person responsible

My car **has been stolen**. (*we don't say by somebody*)

Paul **was arrested**. (*obviously by the police*)

**Spanish is spoken** widely in South America.

She **was advised** to book her flights early.

His father **was injured** in an accident.

We mention *by* + agent:

- when it is important to stress the agent
- to introduce new information not previously mentioned
- to refer to a method or course of action with *by* + *-ing*

The building was designed **by Frank Lloyd Wright**.

We were stopped in the street **by a policeman**.

Our house can be improved **by building an extension**.

Passives are sometimes followed by *with*:

- when talking about materials or instruments
- after participles such as *packed, filled, crowded, crammed, covered, surrounded, decorated*

The passive is commonly used in:

- formal / impersonal written English
- formal academic writing
- headlines and newspaper reports

In signs and headlines, the verb *to be* is often omitted.  
In spoken English, *get* can sometimes replace *be* in the passive.

Chilli **is made with beans**.

The cut **is made with a scalpel**.

The stadium **was packed with** supporters.

The room **was decorated with** flowers.

We **must choose** a title for the article. (*spoken English*)

A title **must be chosen** for the article. (*more formal*)

The blood **is pumped** around the body by the heart.

The team **was defeated** in the final minutes.

Beckham (was) **saved** from kidnap attempt!

Stella **got promoted** to assistant manager. (= *was promoted*)

## THE CAUSATIVE AND RELATED FORMS

The causative is used when we employ someone or arrange for someone (an agent) to do something for us.

### **have / get + object + past participle**

when we employ / arrange for someone to do something

I **will have the report typed** tomorrow.

We **are having an extension built** on the house.

I **got the car repaired**.

I **must get my eyes tested** soon.

### **have + agent + bare infinitive**

when we mention the agent / person

I **had Susan type** the report.

### **have + object + bare infinitive**

when something happens to a person

The chef **had someone complain** about the soup last night.

### **get + agent + to + bare infinitive**

when we persuade someone to do something for us

I **got Susan to type** the report.

### **have + object + verb -ing**

- when somebody causes somebody / something to do something
- when consequences are implied
- when someone won't allow an action

I'll **have you playing** the piano in no time.  
(*I'll teach you to play in a short time.*)

Within minutes, he **had us laughing** at his jokes.

You'll **have dozens of people phoning** at all hours if you put an ad in the paper.

I **won't have you walking** into the house in muddy boots.

## Note

The word order must be preserved in order to give a causative meaning.

Compare: I had my hair cut. (*causative: someone else cut my hair*)      I had cut my hair. (*active verb: I cut my hair myself*)

## SPECIAL STRUCTURES with *have / get*

### **have + object + verb -ing**

have something happening – referring to an experience you did not cause to happen

It's nice to **have the family eating** together at Sunday lunch.

We got home and found we **had water dripping** from the ceiling because a pipe had burst.

### **have + object + past participle**

have something happen to you – sometimes used instead of the passive when referring to an experience or a misfortune the subject had; here, the subject did not cause the action

She **had her house broken into** last night. (*Her house was broken into.*)

The house **had its roof blown off** in a gale. (*The roof was blown off the house.*)

### **get + object + past participle**

when the subject of the sentence does something himself / herself intentionally or accidentally

It will be another hour before I can **get the washing done**. (*intentional*)

She **got her trousers caught** in the fence. (*accidental*)