

Passive Voice

We form the passive voice by putting the verb **to be** into the same tense as the active verb and adding the past participle of the active verb. The direct object of the active verb becomes the subject of the passive verb. The subject of the active verb becomes the "**agent**" of the passive verb and if it is mentioned, is preceded by "**by**". Only transitive verbs can be used in the passive.

Tenses	Active Voice	Passive Voice
Simple Present	She makes dresses.	Dresses are made .
Simple Past	She made the dress.	The dress was made .
Present Continuous	She is making the dress.	The dress is being made .
Past Continuous	She was making the dress.	The dress was being made .
Present Perfect	She has made the dress.	The dress has been made .
Past Perfect	She had made the dress.	The dress had been made .
Future	She will make the dress.	The dress will be made .
Future Perfect	She will have made the dress.	The dress will have been made .
Conditional	She would make the dress.	The dress would be made .
Conditional Perfect	She would have made the dress.	The dress would have been made .
Present Infinitive	She ought to make the dress.	The dress ought to be made .
Perfect Infinitive	She ought to have made the dress.	The dress ought to have been made .
Gerund	He hates people asking him to sing.	He hates being asked to sing.
Perfect Gerund	He remembers his boss having reprimanded him.	He remembers having been reprimanded by his boss.

Notes

- In colloquial English **be** can be replaced by **get** in the passive voice in some expressions.
e.g. He'll **get** (=be) fired if he continues to be late for work.
- have + object + past participle** can be used colloquially to replace a passive verb when we want to talk about an accident or misfortune.
e.g. She **had her leg broken**. (= Her leg **was broken**.)
- The **agent is omitted** when it is a) a pronoun, b) words like **one, someone, people**, etc. or c) **can be easily understood**.
e.g. **Someone** destroyed the evidence. ⇒ The evidence **was destroyed**.

Use

The passive voice is used:

- when the person who performs the action ("agent") can easily be understood.
e.g. He **has been arrested**. (The police have arrested him.)
- when the subject of the active verb is "**people**", "**he**", "**she**", "**they**", "**one**", "**somebody**" etc.
e.g. People say he's wealthy. ⇒ **It is said that he's wealthy**. / **He is said to be wealthy**.
- when we are interested in the **action itself** rather than the person who performs it.
e.g. **The new hospital will be opened tomorrow (by the Minister of Health)**.
- when we mean to be tactful by not naming the agent.
e.g. **All my shampoo has been used**. (instead of: You've used all my shampoo!)

► Further points on the passive voice

1. **make, hear, see, help** are followed by **to + infinitive** in the passive.

e.g. *He made her leave.* ⇒ *She was made **to leave**.*

2. “**let**” becomes “**was/were allowed to**” in the passive. When the subject of “let” and the object of the infinitive that follows “let” are the same, then “let”, when used in the passive voice, is followed by a reflexive pronoun + bare passive infinitive.

e.g. *She let me go out.* ⇒ *I **was allowed to** go out.*
Don't let him tease you. ⇒ *Don't **let yourself be teased**.*

3. The passive with verbs such as **assume, believe, consider, feel, know, report, say, think, understand**, etc. is formed in two ways.

a) **It + passive + that - clause**

e.g. *They believe she is a spy.*
It is believed that she is a spy.

b) **subject + passive + to - infinitive**

e.g. *They believe she is a spy.*
She is believed to be a spy.

4. Verbs which take two objects such as **allow, ask, give, lend, send** etc. have two passive forms.

e.g. *He **showed me** the way to the door.* ⇒ ***I was shown** the way to the door.*
***The way to the door was shown** to me.*

5. **Passive voice** with “**by**” or “**with**”.

by + agent

e.g. *The telephone was invented **by Alexander Graham Bell**.*

**with + instrument
material
past participles**
(such as **filled, packed** etc.)

e.g. *She was killed **with a knife**.*
*Irish coffee is made **with whisky**.*
*The stadium was filled **with thousands of spectators**.*

6. Verbs followed by a certain preposition take the preposition immediately after them when put into the passive.

e.g. *She **accused me of** theft.* ⇒ ***I was accused of** theft.*

7. Prepositional verbs of movement when turned to the passive change to other synonymous verbs which take no preposition.

e.g. *Columbus **reached/arrived in** America in 1492.* ⇒ *America was **reached** (NOT arrived in) by Columbus in 1492.*
*The royal couple **entered/went into** the room arm in arm.* ⇒ *The room was **entered** (NOT gone into) by the royal couple arm in arm.*

8. Modal verb + active infinitive → Modal verb + passive infinitive

e.g. *They **can't repair** the bombed building.* ⇒ *The bombed building **can't be repaired**.*