


Passive (1) (**is done / was done**)

A

Study this example:



This house **was built** in 1930.

'Was built' is *passive*. Compare active and passive:

Somebody **built** this house in 1930. (*active*)  
subject object

This house **was built** in 1930. (*passive*)  
subject

We use an *active* verb to say *what the subject does*:

- My grandfather was a builder. **He built** this house in 1930.
- It's a big company. **It employs** two hundred people.

We use a *passive* verb to say *what happens to the subject*:

- This house is quite old. **It was built** in 1930.
- **Two hundred people are employed** by the company.

B

When we use the passive, who or what causes the action is often unknown or unimportant:

- A lot of money **was stolen** in the robbery. (somebody stole it but we don't know *who*)
- **Is this room cleaned** every day? (does somebody clean it? – it's not important *who*)

If we want to say who does or what causes the action, we use *by*...:

- This house was built **by my grandfather**.
- Two hundred people are employed **by the company**.

C

The passive is **be (is/was/have been etc.) + the past participle (done/cleaned/seen etc.)**:

(be) done (be) cleaned (be) seen (be) damaged (be) built etc.

For irregular past participles (done/known/seen etc.), see Appendix 1.

Study the active and passive forms of the *present simple* and *past simple*:*Present simple**active*: clean(s)/see(s) etc.Somebody **cleans** this room every day.*passive*: am/is/are cleaned/seen etc.This room **is cleaned** every day.

- Many accidents are **caused** by careless driving.
- I'm **not** often invited to parties.
- How is this word **pronounced**?

*Past simple**active*: cleaned/saw etc.Somebody **cleaned** this room yesterday.*passive*: was/were cleaned/seen etc.This room **was cleaned** yesterday.

- We **were woken up** by a loud noise during the night.
- 'Did you go to the party?' 'No, I **wasn't invited**.'
- How much money **was stolen**?

EXERCISES

Complete the sentences using one of these verbs in the correct form:

cause damage hold include invite make overtake show  
translate write

- 1 Many accidents are caused by dangerous driving.
- 2 Cheese ..... from milk.
- 3 The roof of the building ..... in a storm a few days ago.
- 4 There's no need to leave a tip. Service ..... in the bill.
- 5 You ..... to the wedding. Why didn't you go?
- 6 A cinema is a place where films .....
- 7 In the United States, elections for President ..... every four years.
- 8 Originally the book ..... in Spanish and a few years ago it  
..... into English.
- 9 We were driving along quite fast but we ..... by lots of other cars.

Write questions using the passive. Some are present and some are past.

- 1 Ask about the telephone. (when/invent?) When was the telephone invented?
- 2 Ask about glass. (how/make?) How .....
- 3 Ask about Australia. (when/discover?) .....
- 4 Ask about silver. (what/use for?) .....
- 5 Ask about television. (when/invent?) .....

Put the verb into the correct form, present simple or past simple, active or passive.

- 1 It's a big factory. Five hundred people are employed (employ) there.
- 2 Water ..... (cover) most of the Earth's surface.
- 3 Most of the Earth's surface ..... (cover) by water.
- 4 The park gates ..... (lock) at 6.30 p.m. every evening.
- 5 The letter ..... (post) a week ago and it ..... (arrive) yesterday.
- 6 The boat ..... (sink) quickly but fortunately everybody  
..... (rescue).
- 7 Ron's parents ..... (die) when he was very young. He and his sister  
..... (bring) up by their grandparents.
- 8 I was born in London but I ..... (grow) up in the north of England.
- 9 While I was on holiday, my camera ..... (steal) from my hotel room.
- 10 While I was on holiday, my camera ..... (disappear) from my hotel room.
- 11 Why ..... (Sue/resign) from her job? Didn't she enjoy it?
- 12 Why ..... (Bill/sack) from his job? What did he do wrong?
- 13 The company is not independent. It ..... (own) by a much larger company.
- 14 I saw an accident last night. Somebody ..... (call) an ambulance but  
nobody ..... (injure) so the ambulance ..... (not/need).
- 15 Where ..... (these photographs/take)? In London?  
..... (you/take) them?

Rewrite these sentences. Instead of using 'somebody/they/people' etc. write a passive sentence.

- 1 Somebody cleans the room every day. The room is cleaned every day.
- 2 They cancelled all flights because of fog. All .....
- 3 People don't use this road very often. ....
- 4 Somebody accused me of stealing money. I .....
- 5 How do people learn languages? How .....
- 6 People advised us not to go out alone. ....

## Passive (2) (be/been/being done)

Study the following active and passive forms:

A

### Infinitive

active: (to) do/clean/see etc.

Somebody will clean the room later.

passive: (to) be done/cleaned/seen etc.

The room will be cleaned later.

- The situation is serious. Something must be done before it's too late.
- A mystery is something that can't be explained.
- The music was very loud and could be heard from a long way away.
- A new supermarket is going to be built next year.
- Please go away. I want to be left alone.

B

### Perfect infinitive

active: have done/cleaned/seen etc.

Somebody should have cleaned the room.

passive: have been done/cleaned/seen etc.

The room should have been cleaned.

- I haven't received the letter yet. It might have been sent to the wrong address.
- If you hadn't left the car unlocked, it wouldn't have been stolen.
- There were some problems at first but they seem to have been solved.

C

### Present perfect

active: have/has (done)

The room looks nice. Somebody has cleaned it.

passive: have/has been (done)

The room looks nice. It has been cleaned.

- Have you heard the news? The President has been shot!
- Have you ever been bitten by a dog?
- 'Are you going to the party?' 'No, I haven't been invited.'

### Past perfect

active: had (done)

The room looked nice. Somebody had cleaned it.

passive: had been (done)

The room looked nice. It had been cleaned.

- The vegetables didn't taste very good. They had been cooked for too long.
- The car was three years old but hadn't been used very much.

D

### Present continuous

active: am/is/are (do)ing

Somebody is cleaning the room at the moment.

passive: am/is/are being (done)

The room is being cleaned at the moment.

- There's somebody walking behind us. I think we are being followed.
- (in a shop) 'Can I help you, madam?' 'No, thank you. I'm being served.'

### Past continuous

active: was/were (do)ing

Somebody was cleaning the room when I arrived.

passive: was/were being (done)

The room was being cleaned when I arrived.

- There was somebody walking behind us. We were being followed.

EXERCISES

2.1 What do these words mean? Use *it can... or it can't...* . Use a dictionary if necessary.

If something is

- |   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| 1 washable, <del>it can be washed</del> ..... | 4 unusable, .....  |
| 2 unbreakable, it .....                       | 5 invisible, ..... |
| 3 edible, it .....                            | 6 portable, .....  |

2.2 Complete these sentences with one of the following verbs (in the correct form):

carry cause ~~do~~ make repair ~~send~~ spend wake up

Sometimes you need have ('might have', 'could have' etc.).

- The situation is serious. Something must ~~be done~~ before it's too late.
- I haven't received the letter. It might ~~have been sent~~ to the wrong address.
- A decision will not ..... until the next meeting.
- I told the hotel receptionist that I wanted to ..... at 6.30 the next morning.
- Do you think that less money should ..... on armaments?
- This road is in very bad condition. It should ..... a long time ago.
- The injured man couldn't walk and had to .....
- It's not certain how the fire started but it might ..... by an electrical fault.

2.3 Rewrite these sentences. Instead of using 'somebody' or 'they', write a passive sentence.

- Somebody has cleaned the room. ~~The room has been cleaned~~..
- They have postponed the concert. The .....
- Somebody is using the computer at the moment. The computer .....
- I didn't realise that somebody was recording our conversation.  
I didn't realise that .....
- When we got to the stadium we found that they had cancelled the game.  
When we got to the stadium, we found that .....
- They are building a new ring road round the city.  
.....
- They have built a new hospital near the airport.  
.....

2.4 Make sentences from the words in brackets. Sometimes the verb is active, sometimes passive.

(This exercise also includes the past simple – see Unit 41C.)

- There's somebody behind us. (I think / we / follow) ~~I think we're being followed~~...
- This room looks different. (you / paint?) ~~Have you painted it?~~...
- My car has disappeared. (it / steal!) It .....
- My umbrella has disappeared. (somebody / take) Somebody .....
- Tom gets a higher salary now. (he / promote) .....
- Ann can't use her office at the moment. (it / redecorate) .....
- The photocopier broke down yesterday, but now it's OK. (it / work / again; it / repair)  
.....
- The police have found the people they were looking for. (two people / arrest / last night)  
.....
- A tree was lying across the road. (it / blow down / in the storm)  
.....
- The man next door disappeared six months ago. (nobody / see / since then)  
.....
- I was mugged on my way home a few nights ago. (you / ever / mug?)  
.....

# Passive (3)

A

I was born...

We say: I was born... (*not* 'I am born'):

- I was **born** in Chicago.
  - Where were you **born**? (*not* 'where are you born')
- } *past simple*
- but* ● How many babies are **born** every day? *present simple*

B

Some verbs can have two objects. For example, give:

- We gave the police the information. (= We gave the information to the police.)
- object 1*                      *object 2*

So it is possible to make two passive sentences:

- The police were given the information.    *or*    The information was given to the police.

Other verbs which can have two objects are: ask offer pay show teach tell

When we use these verbs in the passive, most often we begin with the *person*:

- I was **offered** the job but I refused it. (= they offered me the job)
- You will **be given** plenty of time to decide. (= we will give you plenty of time)
- Have you **been shown** the new machine? (= has anybody shown you...?)
- The men were **paid** £200 to do the work. (= somebody paid the men £200)

C

I don't like being...

The passive of doing/seeing etc. is **being done** / **being seen** etc. Compare:

*active*: I don't like **people telling me** what to do.

*passive*: I don't like **being told** what to do.

- I remember **being given** a toy drum on my fifth birthday. (= I remember somebody giving me a toy drum...)
- Mr Miller hates **being kept** waiting. (= he hates people keeping him waiting)
- We managed to climb over the wall without **being seen**. (= ...without anybody seeing us)

D

Get

Sometimes you can use **get** instead of **be** in the passive:

- There was a fight at the party but nobody **got hurt**. (= nobody was hurt)
- I don't often **get invited** to parties. (= I'm not often invited)
- I'm surprised Ann **didn't get offered** the job. (...Ann **wasn't offered** the job)

You can use **get** to say that something happens to somebody or something, especially if this is unplanned or unexpected:

- Our dog **got run over** by a car.

You can use **get** only when things happen or change. For example, you cannot use **get** in these sentences:

- Jill **is liked** by everybody. (*not* 'gets liked' – this is not a 'happening')
- He was a mystery man. Nothing **was known** about him. (*not* 'got known')

We use **get** mainly in informal spoken English. You can use **be** in all situations.

We also use **get** in the following expressions (which are not passive in meaning):

- get married    get divorced
- get dressed (= put on your clothes)    get changed (= change your clothes)

EXERCISES

When were they born? Choose five of these people and write a sentence for each. (Two of them were born in the same year.)

|                 |                    |                     |      |      |      |
|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|------|------|------|
| Beethoven       | Galileo            | Elvis Presley       | 1452 | 1869 | 1929 |
| Agatha Christie | Mahatma Gandhi     | Leonardo da Vinci   | 1564 | 1891 | 1935 |
| Walt Disney     | Martin Luther King | William Shakespeare | 1770 | 1904 |      |

1 ~~Walt Disney~~ was born in 1901.

2 .....

3 .....

4 .....

5 .....

6 .....

7 And you? I .....

2 Write these sentences in another way, beginning in the way shown.

1 They didn't give me the money. I ~~wasn't given the money~~..

2 They asked me some difficult questions at the interview.

I .....

3 Janet's colleagues gave her a present when she retired.

Janet .....

4 Nobody told me that George was ill.

I wasn't .....

5 How much will they pay you?

How much will you .....

6 I think they should have offered Tom the job.

I think Tom .....

7 Has anybody shown you what to do?

Have you .....

3 Complete the sentences using being + one of these verbs:

ask attack give invite ~~keep~~ pay

1 Mr Miller doesn't like ~~being kept~~... waiting.

2 They went to the party without .....

3 Most people like ..... presents.

4 It's a dangerous city. People won't go out after dark because they are afraid of .....

5 I don't like ..... stupid questions.

6 Few people are prepared to work without .....

4 Complete the sentences using get/got + one of these verbs (in the correct form):

ask break damage ~~hurt~~ pay steal sting stop use

1 There was a fight at the party but nobody ~~got hurt~~...

2 Ted ..... by a bee while he was sitting in the garden.

3 How did that window .....?

4 These tennis courts don't ..... very often. Not many people want to play.

5 I used to have a bicycle but it .....

6 Last night I ..... by the police as I was driving home.

7 How much did you ..... last month?

8 Please pack these things very carefully. I don't want them to .....

9 People often want to know what my job is. I often ..... that question.