

# THE PASSIVE VOICE

The passive voice in English is used to express what is done to someone or something.

- *The house was sold for \$500,000*
- *The novel was written by Jack Smith in 1912*

In each of these sentences, the subject of the sentences does nothing. Rather, something is done to the subject of the sentence. In each case, the focus is on the object of an action. These sentences could also be written in the active voice.

- *The owners sold the house for \$ 500,000.*
- *Jack Smith wrote the novel in 1912.*

## Passive Voice Sentence Structure:

### **PASSIVE SUBJECT + TO BE + PAST PARTICIPLE**

#### Using the Agent

The person or people taking an action are referred to as “*the agent*”. If the agent (the person or people performing an action) is not important for understanding, the agent can be left out.

Here are some examples:

- *The dogs have already been fed.* (It's not important who fed the dogs)
- *The children will be taught basic math.* (It's clear that a teacher will teach the children)
- *The report will have been finished by the end of next week.* (It's not important who completes the report)

In some cases, it's important to know the agent. In this case, use the preposition **"by"** to express the agent following the passive structure.

- *"The Flight to Brunswick" was written in 1987 by Tim Wilson.*
- *This model was developed by Stan Ishly for our production team.*

In informal English, "get" is also often used to construct passive sentences. But it's not always possible. We use "get" in a passive sentence when we talk about something that happened or something that changed, so it is NOT used for verbs such as 'like', 'believe' or 'say'.

- *That tree was/got blown over in the storm last night.*

### Passive Voice Structure Examples

Active Voice	Passive Voice	Verb Tense
They make Fords in Cologne.	Fords <b>are made</b> in Cologne.	Present Simple
Susan is cooking dinner.	Dinner <b>is being cooked</b> by Susan	Present Continuous
James Joyce wrote "Dubliners".	"Dubliners" <b>was written</b> by James Joyce.	Past Simple
They were painting the house when I arrived.	The house <b>was being painted</b> when I arrived.	Past Continuous
They have produced over 20 models in the past two years.	Over 20 models <b>have been produced</b> in the past two years.	Present Perfect
They are going to build a new factory.	A new factory <b>is going to be built</b> .	Future Intention
I will finish it tomorrow.	It <b>will be finished</b> tomorrow.	Future Simple

In newspapers, the passive is used to shift the focus of attention from the agent to the recipient of the action.

The journalist should be reporting facts and as unbiased as possible and they use the passive voice to remove blame/ responsibility from the doer of an action, they therefore avoid making accusations that have not been proven. For instance, when they write about somebody who has allegedly committed a crime.

## Passive Voice Quiz

Test your knowledge by Conjugating the verbs in parentheses in the passive voice. Pay close attention to the time expressions for clues on tense usage:

1. Our house was painted (paint) brown and black last week.
2. The project will be completed (complete) next week by our marketing department.
3. The plans for the new contract are being drawn up (draw up) right now.
4. More than 30,000 new computers are manufactured (manufacture) every day at our plant in China.
5. I don't know why this class is always so dirty. It is cleaned (clean) every morning.
6. The children have been taught (teach) by Ms Anderson since last year.
7. The piece was written (write) by Mozart when he was only six.
8. My hair is cut (cut) by Julie every month.
9. The portrait was painted (paint) by Van Gogh.
10. The cruise ship was christened (christen) by Queen Elizabeth in 1987.
11. Did you hear that Jane has been promoted (promote) to a management position at work? What great news!
12. My paper is delivered (deliver) every morning by a teenager on his bike.