

Unit 9 Passive voice

Explanations

Uses

1 Transitive and intransitive

Only verbs with an object (transitive) can be made passive.

They sent the letter. The letter was sent.

They arrived late. (Cannot be made passive.)

Verbs with both direct and indirect objects can be made passive in two ways:

They sent me the letter. I was sent the letter.

The letter was sent to me.

2 Like and love

Some verbs which are transitive cannot be made passive in some uses.

I like this place. (A passive form of this sentence would not be acceptable.)

3 Contexts

By placing the object at the beginning of the sentence, the passive can change the focus of interest in a sentence.

United were beaten by Arsenal. (We are more interested in United)

The passive is used in a variety of contexts.

Impersonal statements. *Students are asked not to smoke.*

When the agent is unknown. *My bike has been stolen!*

(This avoids using *someone* or *they*.)

When the agent is obvious. *Mr Jones will be arrested.*

How something was done. *The box was opened with a knife.*

Reporting verbs

1 The passive is often used with *say, believe, understand, know* and similar verbs used in reporting to avoid an impersonal *they* or *people*.

People say that John Wilson lives in New York.

John Wilson is said to live in New York.

2 The past tense and continuous verbs can also be reported in this way.

John Wilson is said to be travelling in Africa.

John Wilson is said to have arrived in Australia.

To have or get something done

1 Causative *have* describes services done for us by someone else.

Last year I had new tiles put on the roof.

2 The same construction can describe misfortunes which happen to us, caused by an unspecified person.

Peter had his car stolen last week.

And then he had his leg broken playing football.



3 Using *get* instead of *have* can suggest managing to do something.

It was difficult but we got the painting done in the end.

Needs doing

This is an idiomatic way of expressing some passive sentences, usually about things or people which need some kind of service.

The floor is filthy. It needs scrubbing.

Verbs and prepositions

If a verb is followed by a preposition and object, the preposition stays with the verb in a passive sentence.

People shouted at the Prime Minister during his speech.

The Prime Minister was shouted at during his speech.

Other problems

1 A passive form in one language is not necessarily translated by a passive form in another.

I was born near London.

2 *Make* (when meaning *force*) is followed by *to* in the passive.

They made David work hard. David was made to work hard.

3 The agent is not always included for reasons given in Uses 3 above.

Activities

1

Underline the verb forms which are not possible.

- My car has being stolen.
- Jack was borned on a Thursday.
- Then I realised that none of the guests had been sent an invitation.
- Mary's car is being serviced today.
- Your order will been sent as soon as possible.
- The hole in the road was being repaired when I came home.
- This swimming pool is used by over a thousand people each week.
- When was this church built?
- An address is writing on the back of the envelope.
- Customers are request to ask for a receipt.

2

Choose the most suitable tense.

- Their new house hasn't been finished / wasn't finished yet.
- The robbers were arrested / have been arrested as soon as they left the bank.
- Sue told us her baby is born / had been born two weeks earlier than expected.
- If there is too much snow, the match has been cancelled / will be cancelled.
- By the time we got there, the rain had stopped / had been stopped.
- When were you told / have you been told about the new rules?
- Most of the passengers were swimming / were swum easily to the shore.
- The winning horse was ridden / was riding by Pat Murphy.
- I looked again for the old man, but he was vanished / had vanished.
- I don't think that you will be asked / are being asked to show your passport.

3

Put each verb in brackets into a suitable passive tense.

- I'm sorry, madam, but this carpet (already sell) has already been sold.
- The old house on the corner (knock down) last year.
- When exactly (John give) his prize?
- Most people agree that America (not discover) by Christopher Columbus.
- All complaints about products (deal with) by our customer services department.
- Police confirmed that the murder weapon (since discover) in a nearby lake.
- It (announce) yesterday that the government has decided not to raise income tax.
- Good news! I (ask) to take over as the new managing director.
- I don't believe that this play (write) by Shakespeare.
- Ann really likes (invite) to dinner parties.

4

Rewrite each sentence, putting the verb underlined in the passive where this is possible.

- I really like this hotel.
..... not possible
- People ate most of the food at the party.
.....
- Jane won the poetry competition.
.....
- Peter's new car cost over £20,000.
.....
- Martin always wears casual clothes.
.....
- One of our visitors lost this cigarette lighter.
.....
- They haven't decided the exact time of the match yet.
.....
- Most of the guests had left the hotel by midday.
.....
- Some parents read to their children every night.
.....
- This bike belongs to my sister.
.....

5

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first, using the word given. (Two to five words)

- Last Thursday we appointed a new marketing manager.
was
A new marketing manager was appointed last Thursday.
- Smith Ltd are supplying our company with furniture.
supplied
Our company by Smith Ltd.
- William the Conqueror built the castle in the 11th century.
by
The castle William the Conqueror in the 11th century.

- No decision has yet been made.
decided
Nothing yet.
- People believe that someone murdered Jenkins.
was
It murdered.
- Your hair needs cutting.
get
You ought cut.
- The police were following the suspects.
were
The suspects police.
- No-one has seen Peter since the day of the party.
been
Peter the day of the party.
- We put up a notice about the trip on the notice board yesterday.
was
A notice up on the notice board yesterday.
- People think that an apple a day is good for you.
to
An apple a day for you.

6

Rewrite each sentence so that it contains a form of *have something done*. Do not include the agent.

- A painter painted our house last month.
We had our house painted last month
- The hairdresser is cutting my hair this afternoon.
.....
- Someone has stolen my motorbike.
.....
- The dentist has taken out all of Ricky's teeth.
.....
- I haven't been to the car-wash for a long time.
.....
- The men are coming to put in the new central heating on Saturday.
.....
- Someone broke Harry's nose in a fight.
.....
- Isn't it time someone fixed your television?
.....
- Helen's publishers have just published her book.
.....
- The police towed away Nigel's car.
.....

7

Rewrite each sentence so that it contains a passive form, and does not contain the words underlined.

- a) Apparently, Freddie has a wife in Scotland.
.....
.....~~Freddie is said to have a wife in Scotland.~~.....
- b) Nobody knows anything about Brenda's family.
.....
.....
- c) People think that someone started the fire deliberately.
.....
.....
- d) You should ask a doctor to see to that cut.
.....
.....
- e) People say that Chris was in the army.
.....
.....
- f) My trousers need to be pressed before I leave.
.....
.....
- g) No-one has signed this letter.
.....
.....
- h) Mary's hair still needs cutting.
.....
.....
- i) People believe that Norma is living in Paris.
.....
.....
- j) The director of the school has decided that smoking is no longer allowed.
.....
.....

8

Look carefully at each line. Some lines are correct, but some have a word which should not be there. Tick each correct line. If a line has a word which should not be there, write the word in the space.

Opening of New Fairdene Sports Centre

The Gulliver Sports Centre, which has been completely rebuilt, was been reopened yesterday by the Minister for Sport. The building it was originally used to as a market, but was sold to Fairdene Council in 1981, and it then converted into a sports hall. Local schools were played football and basketball indoors, and keep fit classes were held there. In 1990 the hall was damaged when by a fire which was broke out in the heating system. The hall could not be used, and remained empty while discussions continued about its future. It was then and decided that the hall would to be rebuilt, and an appeal for money was launched. Two years ago a local businessman offered to pay for the building work, and plans were drawn up. The new hall is includes a swimming pool, running track and other sports facilities which can be used by anyone in the Fairdene area. The Minister was made a speech in which she congratulated everyone involved.

-
.....~~been~~.....
1)
2)
3)
4)
5)
6)
7)
8)
9)
10)
11)
12)
13)
14)
15)