

GRAMMAR

# Passive voice with modal verbs

**LEVEL**

Intermediate (B2)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B2\_3012G

**LANGUAGE**

English



## Learning outcomes

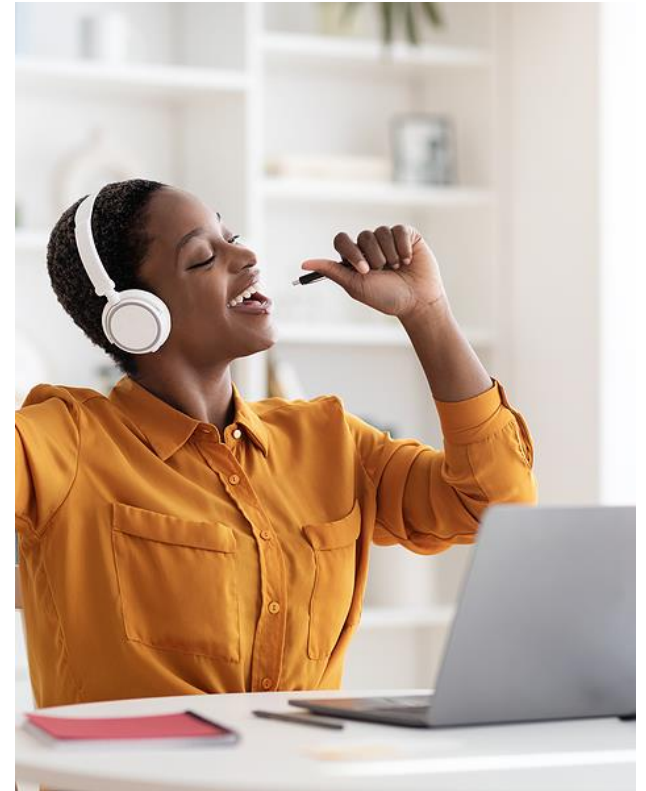
- I can use modal verbs to form sentences and make questions in the passive voice.
- I can use modal verbs with the passive voice in the past tense.



## Warm-up

**What do you  
know about the  
passive voice?**

**In which situations do we use  
the passive voice?**





# Review: using the passive voice

**Read** the explanation. Complete the discussion activity **in breakout rooms** or **as a class**.

We use the passive voice...

- to **emphasise the receiver** of the action, rather than the doer
- when the doer of the action is **unknown, unimportant, or obvious**

**Discuss** why the passive voice is appropriate in the examples below:

## Active

## Passive

Thieves stole the jewels from the safe.

**The jewels were stolen** from the safe.

They put him on a drip because he was dehydrated.

**He was put** on a drip because he was dehydrated.

We add the milk after the eggs.

**The milk is added** after the eggs.

Someone will tell the children tomorrow.

**The children will be told** tomorrow.



# Review: using the passive voice

**Read** the explanation. **Complete** the table.

We can also use the passive voice to **rearrange a sentence** for clarity.

In these examples, the longer expression (the subject in the active voice) is placed at the end. This also serves to highlight the key point.

**Complete** the sentences in the passive voice:

Active	Passive
<b>My sister borrowing my clothes all the time</b> annoyed me.	I was annoyed by my sister borrowing my clothes all the time.
<b>Someone tapping at the glass</b> startled Pete.	_____ by someone tapping at the glass.
<b>A group of men who wanted money</b> took her hostage.	_____ by a group of men who wanted money.



# Review: forming the passive voice

Read the example sentences. Complete the blue box.

The charity concert **is being held** in an old prison.

The rubbish **was dumped** on the street near our house.

She's **been prescribed** medication and it seems to be working.

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- The structure of the passive voice is **be** + **past participle**.
- **Be** changes the **tense** of the sentence. Can you identify the tense in each example?



# Transform the sentences from active to passive

**Transform** the sentences below.

1 They offered him a very good retirement package. > He...

2 They didn't invite her to the party. >

3 We will inform those who are affected by the changes at the end of the week. >

4 We give out awards for the best costume every year. >

5 Someone has opened the letter already! >

# Passive voice with modal verbs: present tense

We often use modals in the passive voice to make sentences more **impersonal**, more **formal** or **less direct**.

In the present tense, **be** remains in the infinitive.

Active	Passive
You can drop your bags at the hotel for a small fee.	Your bags can be dropped at the hotel for a small fee.
We must finish the presentation by tomorrow.	The presentation must be finished by tomorrow.
They ought to consult an expert for this kind of situation.	An expert ought to be consulted for this kind of situation.
You should complete the task before you go home.	The task should be completed before you go home.



# Passive voice with modals: present tense

Protective equipment **must be worn** on these premises.  
The shortlist **will be announced** on Monday.

Passive voice with modal verbs in the present

modal verb



*be*



past participle



**No, that lampshade is  
for the light in the  
living room!**

**Well, you could have  
told me that before I  
went and hung it up!**

How does the second speaker feel about the situation?

Why do you think this is and what does the highlighted phrase convey?

# Passive voice with modal verbs: past tense

The modals can also be used in the past tense in the passive voice.

**Read** the examples below. What do you notice about the structure?

## Passive with modals in the past

He **must have been fired**. I haven't seen him at the office lately.

You **could have been killed**!

They **should have been seen** by a doctor right away.

He **ought to have been asked** to speak at the conference too.



# Passive voice with modals: past tense

He **must have been fired**.  
They **should have been seen** by a doctor

Passive voice with modal verbs in the past

modal verb



*have been*



past participle



# Fill in the gaps

**Complete the sentences** using the modal verbs in the red box in the correct tense. There might be more than one correct answer.

- 1 Don't worry about doing that now, it \_\_\_\_\_ be finished off tomorrow.
- 2 Hurry up! The report \_\_\_\_\_ be written and sent today.
- 3 He \_\_\_\_\_ been put in prison for what he did.
- 4 I \_\_\_\_\_ been allowed to see her. I'm family, after all!
- 5 The cake \_\_\_\_\_ be brought in a cooler so the cream stays fresh.

must  
should  
can  
could  
ought to



# Transform the sentences

**Transform** the sentences from active to passive voice. **Identify** whether they are in the present or past tense.

1 **You should seal the exam papers** in an envelope.



The exam papers should be sealed in an envelope.

2 **Someone must tell Alice** about the change of plan.



3 **They ought to have given him** the benefit of the doubt.



4 **We could have finished it** earlier, but we took our time.



5 **I must have lost it** when I moved apartment.



6 **You can send the submission** by email instead of by post.



# React to the statements

**React** to these statements with a sentence using **modals in the passive voice**.

My jewellery is gone and the window is broken!

They're very late, which isn't like them.

I went to the meeting room but there was nobody there!

I was at the beach all day and now I have a headache!





# Passive voice with modal verbs: questions

Here are some examples of how to **ask questions** using modal verbs in the passive voice.

Active	Passive
Should I finish the task today?	Should the task be finished today?
Could we push the meeting back to 12 pm?	Could the meeting be pushed back to 12 pm?
Can I return this if it doesn't fit?	Can this be returned if it doesn't fit?
When must they hand in their documents?	When must the documents be handed in?



# Passive voice with modal verbs: questions

**Read** the examples below of questions using **past modals in the passive voice**.

## Past modals in the passive voice: questions

Couldn't we have been told this earlier? Nothing can be done about it now.

Shouldn't they have been given the itinerary when they arrived?

Could he have been sent to the wrong office? It's not like him to be late.

Shouldn't you have been seen by the doctor by now?





# What's the question?

**Form questions** using modal verbs in the passive voice.

Yes, the cat  
must be fed  
every morning  
and evening.

Maybe you left  
it at the  
restaurant...

Yes, the pills  
should be  
taken with  
food.

No,  
appointments  
can only be  
made online.





## Discuss

**Do you have any work that must be finished before the end of next week?**



**Have you ever reviewed a project and thought it could have been done better?**



# End of the lesson

Idiom

***No sooner said than done***

**Meaning:** when something is done straight away

**Example:** I can't recommend their service enough. I asked for three hundred copies at short notice, and it was no sooner said than done.



# Additional practice



# Unscramble to make questions

1

Could

2

been

3

given

4

have

5

the keys?

6

the thief



a

Shouldn't

b

by the police

c

been caught

d

have

e

already?

f

the thief





# The passive voice

**Read** the text below. **Complete** the activity in the red box.

When Tom first arrived at his office, someone gave him an ID card, the keys to his locker and someone showed him to his desk.

He sat down for a bit and then he went to make a coffee. While he was making a coffee, he realised that someone was watching him.

He looked over and saw that it was his boss. The boss came over and gave Tom some easy tasks to do.

Tom told him that he would finish the tasks by the end of the day.

1. Change some of the sentences in the text to the passive voice where you think it necessary.
2. Explain why you have made these sentences passive.





# The passive voice

**Answer** these questions in the passive voice, blaming your classmates or teacher!



Who broke the lamp?

Who ate the last biscuit?

Who stole a pound from  
my piggy bank?

Who left a sandwich on  
the seat of my car?



# Answer key

**P.4:** Potential answers to discussion question:

Sentence 1: the doer is unknown/obvious – we don't know *who* stole the jewels and the word "thieves" is redundant in this context (it doesn't add any useful information)

Sentence 2: to emphasise the receiver of the action (John) + the doer is unknown/obvious – we can assume that it was a nurse or other medical professional, from the context

Sentence 3: the doer is unimportant

Sentence 4: to emphasise the receiver of the action (the children)

**P.5:** 2. Pete was startled.... 3. She was taken hostage...

**P.7:**

1. He was offered a very good retirement package. 2. She wasn't invited to the party. 3. Everyone who is affected by the changes will be informed next week. 4. Awards are given out each year for the best costume. 5. The letter has been opened already!



## Answer key

**P.13:** 1. can be 2. must be 3. should/ought to have been 4. should/ought to have been 5. could/must be

**P.14:**

2. Alice must be told about the change of plan.
3. He ought to have been given the benefit of the doubt.
4. It could have been finished earlier, but we took our time.
5. It must have been/gotten lost when I moved apartment.
6. The submission can be sent by email instead of by post.



# Answer key

**P.15:** (Other answers are possible)

1. You must have been robbed. / It must have been stolen.
2. They must/could have been delayed.
3. The meeting could/must have been cancelled. / The meeting room/time of the meeting could/must have been changed.
4. You could/must have been in the sun too long.

**P.18:**

1. How often must the cat be fed? / How often should the cat be fed? / Must the cat be fed every day? / Should the cat be fed every day?
2. Where could it be? / Where could I have left it?
3. Should the pills be taken with food?
4. Can appointments be made over the phone / in person?

**P.23:**

1. Could the thief have been given the keys?
2. Shouldn't the thief have been caught by the police already?



# Summary

## Passive voice with modal verbs:

- We often use modals in the passive voice to make sentences more **impersonal**, more **formal** or to be **less direct**. In the present tense, **be** remains in the infinitive.
- Structure: **modal verb + be + past participle**
- *Protective equipment **must be worn** on the site.*

## Passive voice with past tense modal verbs:

- The structure is **modal verb + have been + past participle**.
- *He **must have been fired**.*
- *They **should have been seen** by a doctor.*

## Passive voice with modal verbs in questions:

- *Should the task be finished today?*
- *Could the meeting be pushed back to 12 pm?*
- *Couldn't we have been told this earlier? Nothing can be done about it now.*
- *Shouldn't they have been given the itinerary when they arrived?*



# Vocabulary

drip

dehydrated

to startle

to dump

you could have told me that

