

Organising information

PART 3: The passive voice

AGiU, Units 22-25

Unit 24

Using passives

C

INFORMATION PRINCIPLE AT WORK! GIVEN + NEW

In English we usually prefer to put the topic (what is already being talked about) at the beginning of a sentence (or clause) and a comment on that topic at the end. Choosing the passive often allows us to do this. Compare these two texts and note where the topic (in *italics*) is placed in the second sentence of each. The second text uses a passive where the emphasis is on the (safety) valves:

- ☐ The three machines tested for the report contained different types of safety valve. The Boron Group in Germany manufactured *all the valves*.
- ☐ The three machines tested for the report contained different types of safety valve. *All the valves* were manufactured by the Boron Group in Germany.

PRINCIPLE OF END WEIGHT

Using the passive allows us to put long subjects at the end of a sentence. So, for example:

- ☐ **I was surprised** by Dev's decision to give up his job and move to Sydney.

is more natural than '*Dev's decision to give up his job and move to Sydney* surprised me', although the choice can depend on considerations of style and context.

D

Instead of making a **that-clause** the subject of a passive sentence, it is normal to use an **it-clause** (see also Unit 25):

INFORMATION PPLE & PPLE OF END WEIGHT

- ☐ Everybody **believed** (that) the plan would fail. (*active*)
- ☐ **It was believed** that the plan would fail. (*passive*) *is more natural than*
- ☐ *That the plan would fail* **was believed** by everybody.

Forming passive sentences 1

Common mistakes:

Verbs that can't be followed by **IO + DO** in the active have only one of these passive forms:

B

active V + DO + prep + IO	passive
He explained me the problem. ✗ He explained the problem to me. ✓	I was explained the problem. ✗ The problem was explained to me. ✓

Also: announce, demonstrate, describe, introduce, mention, propose, report, suggest
(= 'reporting' verbs)

C

Some verbs that are followed by **object + bare infinitive** (= an infinitive without 'to') in the active are followed by a **to-infinitive** in the passive:

active V + object + bare infinitive	passive
They have made him return the money.	He has been made to return the money.

Also: feel, hear, help (also + object + to-infinitive), observe, see (see also Unit 23A)

Common mistakes:

D

Transitive two- and three-word verbs (see also Unit 94)

Some have passive forms:

active	passive
Ella looked after him.	He was looked <u>after</u> (by Ella).

Also: **carry out** (= put into practice),
disapprove of, **hold over** (= delay), **talk down to** (= patronise)

Some are not used in the passive:

active	no passive
We came up against a problem.	A problem was come up against. X

Also: **brush up on** (= revise), **cast (your mind) back** (= try to remember), **get (something) down** (= write), **take after** (= resemble)

Some can be only used in the passive with certain senses:

active	passive
They put out the fire. I put out a hand to steady myself.	The fire was put out. A hand was put out to steady myself. X

Also: (passive possible meaning / no passive meaning): **call (someone) up** (order to join the army / telephone); **call (someone) back** (ask to return / telephone); **let in** (allow into a place / allow rain, etc. in); **let out** (allow to leave / let out a sound)

22.3

If possible, rewrite each sentence using a passive form of the italicised two- or three-word verb. If not, write 'No passive'. **D**

1 Children often *look up to* strict teachers.

Strict teachers are often looked up to by children.

2 The company *phased out* the product over a period of three years.

3 The students *got* the information *down* as fast as they could.

4 The decision has *deprived* many people *of* the right to vote.

5 People often *brush up on* a foreign language just before a holiday.

6 Ben *called* Mrs Patel *back* as soon as he got home.

7 The chairperson *held over* the last two items until the next committee meeting.

8 The farmer *prevented* walkers *from* crossing the field after he *fenced* it *off*.

2 The product was phased out (by the company) over a period of three years.

3 No passive

4 Many people have been deprived of the right to vote (by the decision).

5 No passive

6 No passive

7 The last two items were held over (by the chairperson) until the next committee meeting.

8 Walkers were prevented from crossing the field after it was fenced off (by...).

Unit 23

23.3 Make passive sentences beginning with the italicised word(s). E

1 Kay's questions began to irritate *Marco*.

Marco began to be irritated by Kay's questions. (corresponding meaning)

2 The team captain hopes to select *Omar*.

3 Alastair arranged to take *Kathy* to the station.

4 Critics have come to recognise *Galdos* as one of Spain's greatest novelists.

5 The south coast continues to attract *holidaymakers*.

6 Harris has agreed to interview *the Finance Minister*.

Do the sentences you have written have a corresponding meaning to the original, or a different meaning? Look carefully at the tense in the sentences given.

2 Omar hopes to be selected by the team captain. (different meaning)

3 Kathy arranged to be taken to the station by Alastair. (different meaning)

4 Galdos has come to be recognised as one of Spain's greatest novelists by critics. (corresponding meaning)

5 Holidaymakers continue to be attracted to the south coast. (corresponding meaning)

6 The finance minister has agreed to be interviewed by Harris (different meaning)

B

Note also that some verbs have related nouns which express the same meaning. These nouns can be used as the subject of passive sentences, with a new passive verb introduced. Compare the example above and:

- ☐ The **installation** of the new computer system **will be completed** by next month.

24.2 Rewrite these sentences beginning with a noun formed from the italicised verb (with the if necessary). Use a passive form of the verb in brackets, and make any other necessary changes. **B**

- 1 They will *consider* the issue at next week's meeting. (*give*)
Consideration will be given to the issue at next week's meeting.
- 2 They will *appoint* a new managing director next week. (*make*)
- 3 People have *accused* the local council of corruption. (*make*)
- 4 They *demolished* the building in only two days. (*complete*)
- 5 They will *present* the trophy after the speeches. (*make*)
- 6 Local residents will certainly *resist* the proposed new industrial area. (*expect*)

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- 5 They will *present* the trophy after the speeches. (*make*)
- 6 Local residents will certainly *resist* the proposed new industrial area. (*expect*)

- 2 The appointment of a new managing director will be made next week.
- 3 Accusations of corruption in the local council have been made. /
Accusations of corruption have been made against the local council.
- 4 The demolition of the building was completed in only two days.
- 5 The presentation of the trophy will be made after the speeches.
- 6 Resistance from local residents to the proposed new industrial area will certainly be expected.

B

Another common way of reporting what is said by an unspecified group of people is to use **it + passive verb + that-clause** (see Unit 33 for more on **that-clauses**). Using this pattern allows us to put important information at the end of the sentence (see Unit 24C):

- ☐ **It is reported** *that* the damage is extensive. (*compare* The damage is extensive, according to government sources.)
- ☐ **It was decided** *that* the meeting should be cancelled. (*or* It was decided to cancel the meeting.)

INFORMATION PPLE & PPLE OF END WEIGHT!!

Also: allege, announce, assume, believe, calculate, claim, consider, demonstrate, discover, establish, estimate, expect, feel, find, know, mention, recommend, reveal, say, show, suggest, suppose, think, understand; agree, decide, hope, intend, plan, propose (can also be followed by a to-infinitive clause)

Reporting with passives; **It is said that ...**

C

An alternative to **it + passive verb + that-clause** is to use **subject + passive verb + to-infinitive** if we want the subject to be the topic of the sentence (see Unit 24C). Compare:

- ☐ **It is reported** *that* the damage is extensive. *and*
- ☐ **The damage is reported** *to be* extensive.

Most of the verbs listed in the first white box in **B** can also be used in this pattern except for **announce, decide, mention, propose, recommend, suggest**.

E

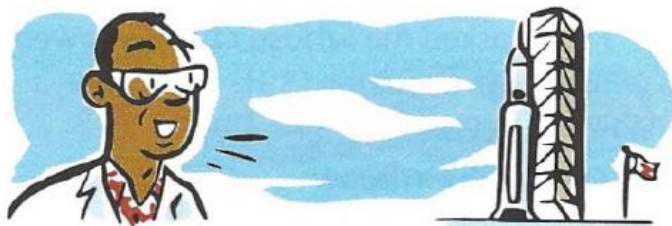
When a **that-clause** begins **that + there ...**, we can make a corresponding passive form **there + passive verb + to be / to have been**. Compare:

- ☐ **It is thought** (that) **there are** too many obstacles to peace. *and*
- ☐ **There are thought to be** too many obstacles to peace.

We can use the same verbs in this pattern as with **subject + passive verb + to-infinitive** (see C).

25.3

Write two new sentences for each numbered sentence below, using **it + passive verb + that-clause** in one sentence and **subject + passive verb + to-infinitive** in the other. (The second pattern may not always be possible.) **C**



(1) We have discovered that a mechanical fault caused the problem. (2) We don't think that the fault is serious. (3) We expect that it will take several weeks to correct the fault. (4) We have decided to postpone the next rocket launch, and (5) we suggest that the next launch should take place in May.

1 *It has been discovered that a mechanical fault caused the problem. / A mechanical fault was discovered to have caused the problem.*

2 *It is not thought that the fault is serious. (or It is thought that the fault is not serious.) / The fault is not thought to be serious.*

3 *It is expected that it will take several weeks to correct the fault. (or It is expected that the fault will take several weeks to correct.) / The fault is expected to take several weeks to correct.*

4 *It has been decided to postpone the next rocket launch.*

5 *It is suggested that the next launch should take place in May.*



The passive in news headlines

