

Active and Passive Voice

Here is a detailed explanation of the active and passive voice.

Let's start from the beginning:

What do we mean by "voice"?

Voice is the form of a verb that shows whether the subject of a sentence does **the action** (= the active voice) or is **affected by it** (= the passive voice).

Examples:

In the sentence "**James hit the ball,**" the verb "hit" is in the active voice. In other words, the form "hit" shows that the subject (James) did the action. The sentence "James hit the ball" is an **active sentence**.

In the sentence "**The ball was hit by James,**" the verb "was hit" is in the passive voice. In other words, the form "was hit" shows that the subject (The ball) was affected by the action. The sentence "The ball was hit by James" is a **passive sentence**.

Here are some more
examples:

Active: The ball hit Janet.

Passive: Janet was hit /
Janet was hit by the ball.



Active: He wrote a letter.

Passive: The letter was written /
The letter was written by him.



Active: The mailman carried the mail.

Passive: The mail was carried /
The mail was carried by the mailman.



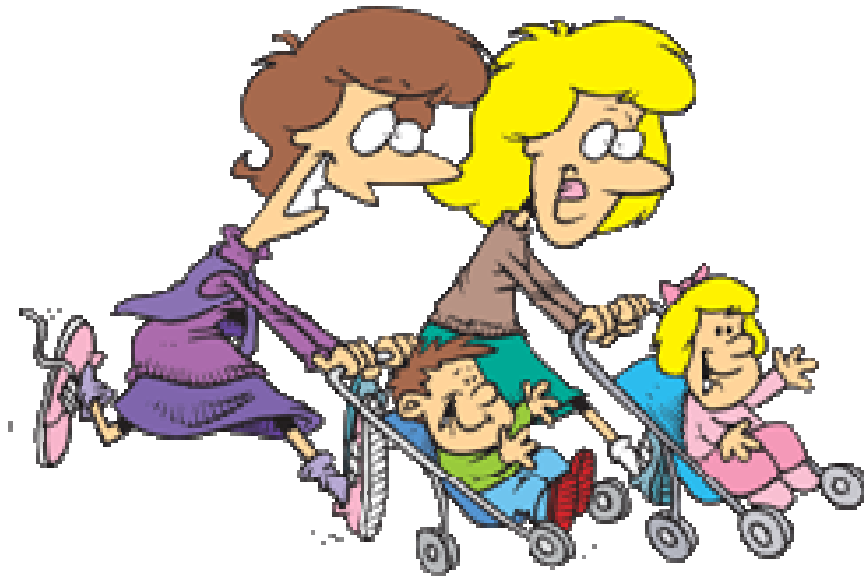
Active: Kevin took a picture.

Passive: A picture was taken / A picture was taken by Kevin.



Active: They took the kids for a walk.

Passive: The kids were taken for a walk /
The kids were taken for a walk by their moms.



Active or Passive?

Most of the sentences in English are active sentences.

And if you think about it, they tend to be **much more simple** than passive sentences.

Have a look at these sentence and see for yourself:

We ate lunch / The lunch was eaten.

I have written a book / A book was written.

They will buy a yacht / A yacht will be bought.

Which version is more **simple** and **common**?

However, in some cases, *it can be useful* to use the passive voice.

For example, **when you want to tell about an action, but you don't want to mention who does it:**

"Joe broke the window."
(It is clear who did it.)

"The window was broken."
(Here you only describe the action, without mentioning who actually did it.)

Another use of the passive voice is **when you want to emphasize the *object* and not the *subject*:**

"Charles sold the company."

(Here the emphasis is on Charles doing the action.)

"The company was sold."

(Here the emphasis is on the fact that the company was sold.)

Active and Passive Voice Examples

In this section we will give active and passive voice examples and explanations to help you teach/learn this important subject.

But first, here is a reminder:

What do "active" and "passive" mean?

In the **active voice**, the **agent** (person/thing doing the action) is the subject of the sentence.

For example:

A dog.



The dog **bit** the mailman.



Now, in the **passive voice**, the agent is either not known or is less important.

For example:

A mailman.



The mailman **was bitten**.

(The agent is not known or not specified.)

The mailman **was bitten** by the dog.

(The agent, "the dog," is less important than the
object "the mailman.")



**How do we make a
passive sentence?**

The important factor in creating the passive sentence is **the third form of the verb** (also called **V3, or past participle**).

Regular verbs have the same past participle and simple past form, but **irregular verbs** can be different.

For example...

Regular verbs

Verb 1
(First form of
the verb)
= base form

work

help

bake

Verb 2
(Second form
of the verb)
= simple past
form

worked

helped

baked

Verb 3
(Third form of
the verb)
= past
participle form

worked

helped

baked

Irregular verbs

Verb 1
(First form of
the verb)
= base form

bite

draw

come

Verb 2
(Second form of
the verb)
= simple past
form

bit

drew

came

Verb 3
(Third form of
the verb)
= past participle
form

bitten

drawn

come

Once you know the correct past participle, then the verb BE in the correct form is used to make the passive.

Examples:

The mailman **is bitten** every day.

The mailman **was bitten** yesterday.

The mailman **has been bitten** today.

The mailman **will be bitten** tomorrow.

The mailman doesn't like **to be bitten**.

Any tense in English can be used in the passive voice, including the infinitive.

Some real active and passive voice examples

The **passive voice** is more **common** in **written English** and is often **avoided** in **spoken English**.

It is **often used in newspapers**, and in **academic writing and reports**.

Examples:

Taxes **to be raised** next year. (*newspaper headline*)

This is the infinitive passive.

The swimming pool **is closed** because it **is being cleaned**. (*a notice*)

This is the present progressive passive.

The house **was built** in 1898.

This is the **simple past passive**.

The concert tonight **has been canceled** because the guitarist is sick.

This is the **present perfect passive**.

Your groceries **will be delivered** this afternoon.

This is the **future passive** (using will.)

In all of these examples, we either don't know WHO is performing / performed / will perform the action, or it isn't important.

Compare the above sentences with the following real examples of the active voice:

The government **has decided to raise** taxes next year.
(The government performed the action.)

Cleaners **are working** in this area. Please be careful.

They **are building** a house across the road from my office.

(Here, spoken English is avoiding the passive by using "They are" instead. This is very common.)

I'm very disappointed they've **canceled** the concert tonight.

**Why use the passive
voice?**

As we've seen above, the passive voice is often avoided in spoken English, so why bother?

The passive voice gives a more **formal tone** to your writing.

It also **enables you to speak more neutrally** about things, rather than using your own opinions

For example:

"It is said that..."

"It is believed that..."

And so forth.

It is also important to understand the passive when you are reading, since if you don't realize the passive voice is being used, it can lead to misunderstandings of the text.

You will find real active and passive voice examples everywhere you look, and it is a good practice to make a note of ones you find, and try to think about why they have been used.

"Have Something Done"

One of the ways we use the passive voice is to talk about an action without saying who did it.

For example, we can see this person relaxing because someone else is taking care of his problems! How can we express this meaning with the passive voice?



There is a special passive construction with
have:

have + **something** (the object) + **past
participle**

example: I **have** **my business** **taken care of**.
(Somebody is taking care of my business.)

another example: He **has** **his dog** **walked**.
(Somebody walks his dog.)

In this construction, like in all passive sentences, we need to use the **past participle**.

Remember that for regular verbs, this is the same as the **simple past**.

However, for **irregular verbs**, the past participle can be different!

Be sure to review them and use the correct form of the verb in passive constructions.

We can use this construction in the following cases:

We make someone else do something for us, or we pay someone else to do something for us.

Something negative happens and we have no control over it (something bad happens to us).

First, let's talk about when someone else does something that we ask of them.

Example:

Jeremy's car is in terrible condition! He is going to have his car fixed. He hopes it won't be too expensive!

This means that Jeremy will not do the work himself. He will pay a professional mechanic to do the work for him. He will have the work done to his car.



More examples:

The living room in Terry's new house is a terrible salmon pink color. She wants to have it painted before she moves in.

Lizzy can't talk right now. She's having her hair cut by the barber at the moment.

I need to go to the dentist today to have a tooth pulled. I hope it's very fast!

Will you have your party catered, or are you going to cook all the food yourself?

Emily had her dress sewn by a professional seamstress. She wanted it to look perfect for her special day!



We can use this construction in any of the English verb tenses. All we need to do is use the correct form of **have** depending on the verb tense we are using. The rest of the construction (object + past participle) remains exactly the same.

Now, let's look at the second meaning of **have + object + past participle**.

We can also use this construction when something negative happens to us when we don't expect it or want it.

Example:

The homeowner had all his money stolen! The police still haven't caught the mysterious robber.

The owner of the money did not want it to be stolen. This was a negative experience that this person suffered.



More examples:

The children are all upset because they had their toys taken away. They wanted to keep playing!

The event was supposed to be outside, but look at all this rain! The organizer, Ms. Huffington, is terribly upset because she's had her big event ruined.

Bruno is still not back at work.
He says he's had his heart broken! It's so terrible that he's going through that divorce.

Phil doesn't want to come back to class. He had his feelings hurt last week, and he just isn't enthusiastic about the subject anymore.



Poor Phil! He suffered a negative experience that he did not expect! He certainly didn't want to be teased!

These constructions can seem confusing at first, but with practice, you'll feel comfortable with them. If you're still not sure how to use the passive voice, look at more examples. And keep on practicing!

Active and Passive Voice Exercises

Follow the links below and take the quizzes.

Send screenshots of your successful scores of at least **70% each** to your respective TL's email.

- <http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=passive-voice> 19
- <http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=active-and-passive-voices>
- <http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=passive-voice> 14

THE END!



Resource used for this material: Really-Learn-English.com. 2010-2014