**THE PASSIVE VOICE**

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The passive voice is formed by using the auxiliary ‘to be’ and the past participle of the verb. The passive verb is used to say what happens to the subject (*The window was broken*) whereas the active verb is used to say what the subject does (*The boy broke the window*).

1. **Transformation**
2. The passive voice is formed from the active by placing the object of the active as the subject of the passive. The passive verb is formed by ‘to be’ having the same tense as that of the active verb and the past participle of the verb. All the tenses and the forms can be used in the passive with the exception of the present perfect continuous, the past perfect continuous or the future continuous for reasons of style. The following table illustrates.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Active voice** | **Passive voice** |
| **Present simple →** | **am / is / are + PP** |
| Bank robbers generally wear stocking masks. | Stocking masks *are* generally *worn.* |
| **Present continuous →** | **am / is / are being + PP** |
| The police are searching every car for smuggled drugs. | Every car *is being searched* for smuggled drugs*.* |
| **Present perfect →** | **has / have been + PP** |
| The police have caught the escaped prisoner. | The escaped prisoner *has been caught.* |
| **Past simple →** | **was / were + PP** |
| The thieves stole her diamond necklace. | Her diamond necklace *was stolen.* |
| **Past continuous →** | **was / were being + PP** |
| The police were watching the house when the burglar escaped. | The house *was being watched* when the burglar escaped. |
| **Past perfect →** | **had been + PP** |
| The pickpocket had stolen the wallet. | The wallet *had been stolen.* |

1. Modals follow the same rule of transformation into the passive (modal + be + PP)

* Parliament will pass a new law against corruption. **→***A new law against corruption will be passed.*
* You mustn't park your car on double yellow lines. **→** *Your car mustn't be parked on double yellow lines.*
* More people ought to obey the traffic regulations. **→** *The traffic regulations ought to be obeyed.*
* Parents have to control children's aggressive behaviour. **→** *Children's aggressive behaviour has to be controlled.*
* *I need to mend my broken window.***→** *My broken window needs to be mended.*

N.B.: With *need* the passive is more often formed by using the gerund of the verb than the infinitive: **→** *My broken window needs mending.*

1. It is possible, as well, to use the passive voice in other verb forms, namely, infinitive and perfect infinitive, and gerund and perfect gerund.

* He expects to finish most of the work soon. **→** *He expects most of the work to be finished soon.* (Infinitive)
* *She’s really excited to have been chosen to play the part.* (Perfect infinitive)
* I remember my father taking me to the zoo **→** *I remember being taken to the zoo.* (Gerund)
* *Tom didn’t mention having been promoted when we talked.* (Perfect gerund)

1. It is also possible to form the passive form with negatives and questions.

* The judge didn't sentence the murderer to life imprisonment. **→** *The murderer wasn't sentenced to life imprisonment. (negative form)*
* Do bank robbers generally wear stocking masks? **→** *Are stocking masks generally worn (by bank robbers)? (question form)*
* Who phoned the doctor? **→** *Who**was the doctor phoned by? (question form)*

1. **The Use of the Passive Voice**

The passive voice is used instead of the active voice in two kinds of sentences.

1. When the agent, the person doing the action, is unknown or is referred to in a vague, general way, such as *they, people, someone,* etc. The agent then is omitted in the passive:

* *Oil is exported to European countries.*
* *Laws are made in Parliament.*
* *My handbag was stolen yesterday.*

1. When the agent is known, but the action itself seems more important than the person who does it. The agent, when mentioned, is placed after the subject and the verb and preceded by ‘*by’ :*

* A gunman shot my friend last week. **→** *My friend was shot last week.*
* Scientists invent every day new ways for saving energy. **→** *New ways for saving energy are invented every day.*

**N.B.: a.** In some cases, it is necessary to mention the agent because the meaning is incomplete without it or for emphasis.

* Shakespeare wrote Hamlet. **→** *Hamlet was written by Shakespeare*. (not *~~Hamlet was written.~~* - incomplete meaning)
* Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Liza. **→***The Mona Liza was painted by Leonardo da Vince*. (not *~~The Mona Liza was painted~~*. - incomplete meaning)
* *Is the national anthem ‘kassaman’ written by Moufdi Zakaria or (by) Kateb Yassine?* (emphasis)

1. It is also necessary to mention the agent to give information about the causes.

* A goldfish stung the little boy. **→**  *The little boy was stung by a goldfish.*
* The antibiotics can’t cure this disease. **→** *This disease can’t be cured by antibiotics*.

1. Because an agent is mentioned in such sentences the preposition ‘*by’* is used, but if something inanimate is mentioned other prepositions may be used, namely, ‘*with*’ or ‘*in*’.

* Gas filled the cellar. **→** *The cellar was filled with gas.*
* The food contained arsenic. **→** *Arsenic was contained in the food.*

1. **Particular Cases**

**3.1. Objects in Passives**

1. Passives are formed from transitive verbs describing actions; indeed, intransitive verbs can’t yield a passive form.

* The team wins the championship twice. **→** *The championship is won twice.* (Transitive verb)
* They woke up late. **→** *~~They were woken up late~~*~~.~~ (Intransitive verb)

1. If a sentence has both a direct and an indirect object, then it is possible to have two passive forms:

* Someone gave me a parking ticket at lunchtime. **→**

a**.** *I was given a parking ticket at lunchtime.*

***or*** b. *A parking ticket was given to me at lunchtime.*

But, in fact, the first of these two forms is far more usual, where the indirect object *me* becomes the subject *I.*

**N.B. a.** But verbs that can’t be followed by an indirect then direct object in the active, i.e. they can be followed only by a direct object, preposition and indirect object (DO+prep+IO), have only one passive form.

* She explained the situation to us.→ *The situation was explained to us.*

Not (~~She explained us the situation~~ . → *~~We were explained the situation.~~)*

Such verbs are to do with reporting what was said or thought like: demonstrate, describe, announce, mention, present, report, suggest, propose, introduce.

**b.** Complements in active sentences can’t be the subjects of the passive.

* They elected Clinton president twice. → *Clinton was elected twice*. (Not ~~President was elected Clinton twice.~~)
  1. **Phrasal Verbs**

It is possible to form passives from transitive phrasal verbs, and the preposition/adverb is placed directly after the verb.

* The robbers broke into the house. **→** *The house was broken into*.
* They had thrown away the old newspapers. **→** *The old newspapers had been thrown away.*
* My friends went away. ( not possible because it’s an intransitive phrasal verb)

Even verbs followed by prepositions and objects (verb + preposition + object) can be put in the passive form.

* Meriem writes to him twice a month. **→** *He is written to twice a month.*
* You can play with these cubs safely. **→** *These cubs can be played with safely*.
  1. **Have and to be born**

The verb ‘have’ cannot be used into the passive form and ‘to be born’ can only be used into the passive.

* My grandfather has ten children. **→** *~~Ten children are had.~~* (incorrect use of the passive)
* My aunt’s daughter was born in Malaysia. **→** *~~My aunt born her daughter in Malaysia.~~* (incorrect use of the active)

**N.B.** The verb ‘marry’ is usually put into the passive.

* My parents *were married* in 1970.
  1. **Passive with Reporting**

1. Reporting sentences, i.e., sentences of the type: People said/thought…that… can have two possible passives.

* People think that Sheikh Ali is 115 years old.

**→** *It is thought that Sheikh Ali is 115 years old.*

or Sheikh *Ali is thought to be 115 years old.*

* They say that she was furious against her neighbour.

**→** *It is said that she was furious against her neighbour.*

or *She is said to have been furious against her neighbour*.

The infinitive construction is often preferred to the *impersonal* *it.*

**N.B.**: If the thought or idea refers to a previous action, then the perfect infinitive is used.

* People know that he attacked an old woman.**→** *He is known to have attacked an old woman.*

Other verbs of this type are: believe, acknowledge, assume, claim, consider, estimate, feel, find, know, presume, report, understand, expect, allege, etc.

1. The infinitive can be perfect or continuous depending on the tense of the verb in the reported clause.

* It is expected that the crisis will end soon. **or** *The crisis is expected to end soon.*
* It is said that the boy is wearing a blue jacket. **or** *The boy is said to be wearing a blue jacket.*
* It is rumored that the pilot was responsible of the ferry crash. **or** *The pilot is rumored to have been responsible of the ferry crash.*

1. **‘Be supposed to’** can sometimes have the meaning of ‘it is said to…’ but some other times it conveys the idea of duty, ‘you should’.

* Let’s go and see that film. It’*s supposed to* be very good. (=It is said to be very good.)
* She *is supposed to* know how to manage in such situations. (= It is her duty / she should know how to manage…)
  1. **Passive with 'to have'**

The passive can also be used with ‘to have’ and the past participle, i.e. the construction ‘have something done’ to say that the action is done by somebody else instead of the subject himself. The order of words is important to ensure the desired meaning (i.e. have + object + past participle). It is possible to use this construction with all tenses.

* *Ahmed redecorated the room*. (= He, himself, redecorated the room.)
* *Ahmed had the room redecorated*. (= He engaged somebody else to redecorate the room for him.)
* *He always has his burglar alarm tested every year.*
* *He is having his house re-wired.*
* *They have already had their passport photographs taken.*
* *We had the telephone installed last week.*
* *I will have the windows cleaned before I put up the new curtains*
* *They might have had the locks changed*

This construction may have a different meaning. It is also used to say that something bad happened to someone or their belongings.

* *My son had his arm broken.* (This doesn’t mean that he arranged someone to break his arm. It just means that something not nice happened to him.)
  1. **Passives with ‘get’**

It is possible to use ‘get’ with the past participle instead of ‘have’ with the past participle for events (when things happen) and for difficult or bad situations, but it is usually in informal (spoken) situations.

* *Tom didn’t get invited to any of the parties.* (Tom wasn’t invited to any of the parties.)
* *Why does Susan get offered the job?* (Why is Susan offered the job?)
* *Two children fought in the street, one of them got hurt.* (One of them was hurt.)
* *~~John got liked by everybody~~.* (It is not an event)

We also use ‘get’ in the following expressions (which are not passive in meaning)

*get married, get divorced get dressed* (=put on your clothes)

*get lost* (=not know where you are) *get changed* (=change your clothes)