

# THE PASSIVE VOICE

**1. The tenses of the passive:** The passive is formed by [BE] + PAST PARTICIPLE

- a) Present Simple: is/are + Past Participle: *Smoking is not allowed.*
- b) Present Continuous: is/are being + Past Participle: *Dinner is being served.*
- c) Past Simple: was/were + Past Participle: *He was killed.*
- d) Past Continuous: was/were being + Past Participle: *It was being repaired.*
- e) Present Perfect: has/have been + Past Participle: *They have been hurt.*
- f) Future: will be + Past Participle: *It will be built soon.*
- g) Going-to: is going to be + Past Participle: *It's going to be built soon.*

**2. The use of the passive:** The passive is used when it's not important who or what did the action or when we don't know who or what did the action.

- a) active: *They built the church in 1688.*

AGENT                      OBJECT

passive: *The church was built in 1688.*

The agent (= subject) of the active sentence is left out in the passive sentence because it's not important. The object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence.

- b) active: *They have stolen my car.* (the agent is unknown)  
passive: *My car has been stolen.*

**The passive voice is used:**

- when the agent is unimportant or unknown: *The product line has been cleaned and checked.*
- to describe systems or processes: *The invoices are dated, stamped and filed in this cabinet.*
- to create an impersonal or informal style: *I regret to inform you that several items have been damaged in transit.*

**3. Including the agent (doer):** The agent which is the person or thing responsible for the action can be used in a passive sentence if it is important. It is expressed in a BY-phrase (someone who does the action - agent) or in a WITH-phrase (what is the action done with - instrument).

agent: *Hamlet was written by Shakespeare.*  
*The house was destroyed by fire.*

instrument: *He was killed with a knife.*

**4. Verbs with two objects:** Some verbs can be followed by two objects: an indirect object (IO) and a direct object (DO). Both objects can be the subject of the passive verb:

active: Her husband has given the painting (DO) to the gallery (IO).

passive: The painting has been given to the gallery by her husband.

The gallery has been given the painting by her husband.

When one of the objects is a person, it is more usual for this to be the subject.

active: *They gave Bobby a new bike for his birthday.*

passive: *Bobby was given a new bike for his*

*birthday.*

active: *They found her a new husband.*

passive: *She was found a new husband.*

**5. Phrasal verbs:** The verb and the preposition must not be separated. The preposition comes after the verb at the end of the sentence.

active: Everybody was laughing at her.

passive: She was being laughed at.

active: Someone reads to the baby.

passive: The baby is read to.