

The Passive Voice

I- Use of the Passive Voice

Passive voice is used when the **focus is on the action**. It is not important or not known who or what is performing the action.

Example: "A letter was written."

The focus, here, is on the fact that a letter was written. We don't know who wrote it.

Sometimes a statement in passive is more **polite** than active voice, as the following example shows:

1- You broke the vase. (Active)

2- A vase was broken. (Passive)

Focus, here, is on the fact that a vase was broken, but we don't blame anyone. So it is more polite to use passive (sentence 2)

II- Form of the Passive Voice

The passive is formed with the verb *to be* (in the appropriate tense) + *past participle* (of the main verb)

NB: The appropriate form of *to be* = **To be** is put in the tense of the active voice main verb.

When rewriting active sentences in passive voice, note the following:

- The object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence.
- The form of the verb is the appropriate form of *to be* (the tense of the active voice main verb) + the past participle.
- The subject of the active sentence becomes the object of the passive sentence (or is dropped.)

Examples of Passive

- The terrorist **was arrested** early this morning.
- Toyota cars **are made** in Japan.
- A new class representative **will be chosen** on Monday.

NB: These examples show that a passive sentence can be in whatever tense you like. The tense of the verb *to be* changes to give different tenses in the passive.

Review of the Verb *to be*:

The Present Simple Tense – AM, IS, ARE

The Present Continuous Tense – AM/IS/ARE BEING

The Present Perfect Tense – HAVE BEEN, HAS BEEN

The Past Simple Tense – WAS, WERE

The Past Continuous Tense – WAS/WERE BEING

The Past Perfect Tense – HAD BEEN

The Future Tense – WILL BE

With modals – CAN BE, WOULD BE, SHOULD BE, MAY BE, MUST BE...

Passive Sentences with Two Objects

Rewriting an active sentence with two objects in passive voice means that one of the two objects becomes the subject, the other one remains an object. Which object to transform into a subject depends on what you want to put the focus on.

Example:

	Subject	Verb	Object 1	Object 2
Active	Rita	wrote	a letter	to me
Passive	A letter	was written	to me	by Rita
Passive	I	was written	a letter	by Rita

Impersonal Passive

This type of passive is called impersonal because we use the impersonal form "it is..." This is only possible with verbs of perception (e. g. say, think, know ...)

Examples:

- They say that the planet is in danger.
- It is said that the planet is in danger.

- It is thought that...
- It is believed that...
- It is known that...

It is also common that we start the passive form of these sentences with the subject of the “*that-clause*”; the verb of perception is put into passive voice; The rest of the sentence is added using an infinitive construction with 'to'.

Examples :

- They say that the planet is in danger.= The planet is said to be in danger.
- They think that women live longer than men. = Women are thought to live longer.