


# Passive (1) (is done / was done)

**A** Study this example:



This house **was built** in 1930.  
 'Was built' is *passive*. Compare active and passive:

Somebody **built** this house in 1930. (*active*)  
subject                      object

**This house** was built in 1930. (*passive*)  
subject

We use an *active* verb to say *what the subject does*:

- My grandfather was a builder. He **built** this house in 1930.
- It's a big company. It **employs** two hundred people.

We use a *passive* verb to say *what happens to the subject*:

- This house is quite old. It **was built** in 1930.
- Two hundred people **are employed** by the company.

**B** When we use the passive, who or what causes the action is often unknown or unimportant:

- A lot of money **was stolen** in the robbery. (somebody stole it but we don't know *who*)
- **Is this room cleaned** every day? (does somebody clean it? – it's not important *who*)

If we want to say who does or what causes the action, we use *by*...:

- This house was built **by my grandfather**.
- Two hundred people are employed **by the company**.

**C** The passive is **be** (is/was/have been etc.) + the *past participle* (done/cleaned/seen etc.):

(be) done (be) cleaned (be) seen (be) damaged (be) built etc.

For irregular past participles (done/known/seen etc.), see Appendix 1.

Study the active and passive forms of the *present simple* and *past simple*:

<i>Present simple</i>	
active: clean(s)/see(s) etc.	Somebody cleans <b>this room</b> every day.
passive: am/is/are cleaned/seen etc.	<b>This room</b> is cleaned every day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many accidents are caused by careless driving.</li> <li>• I'm not often invited to parties.</li> <li>• How is this word pronounced?</li> </ul>	
<i>Past simple</i>	
active: cleaned/saw etc.	Somebody cleaned <b>this room</b> yesterday.
passive: was/were cleaned/seen etc.	<b>This room</b> was cleaned yesterday.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were woken up by a loud noise during the night.</li> <li>• 'Did you go to the party?' 'No, I wasn't invited.'</li> <li>• How much money was stolen?</li> </ul>	

## EXERCISES

**41.1** Complete the sentences using one of these verbs in the correct form: **cause** damage hold include invite make overtake show translate write

- 1 Many accidents **are caused** by dangerous driving.
- 2 Cheese ..... from milk.
- 3 The roof of the building ..... in a storm a few days ago.
- 4 There's no need to leave a tip. Service ..... in the bill.
- 5 You ..... to the wedding. Why didn't you go?
- 6 A cinema is a place where films .....
- 7 In the United States, elections for President ..... every four years.
- 8 Originally the book ..... in Spanish and a few years ago it ..... into English.
- 9 We were driving along quite fast but we ..... by lots of other cars.

**41.2** Write questions using the passive. Some are present and some are past.

- 1 Ask about the telephone. (when/invent?) **When was the telephone invented?**
- 2 Ask about glass. (how/make?) How .....
- 3 Ask about Australia. (when/discover?) .....
- 4 Ask about silver. (what/use for?) .....
- 5 Ask about television. (when/invent?) .....

**41.3** Put the verb into the correct form, present simple or past simple, active or passive.

- 1 It's a big factory. Five hundred people **are employed** (employ) there.
- 2 Water ..... (cover) most of the Earth's surface.
- 3 Most of the Earth's surface ..... (cover) by water.
- 4 The park gates ..... (lock) at 6.30 p.m. every evening.
- 5 The letter ..... (post) a week ago and it ..... (arrive) yesterday.
- 6 The boat ..... (sink) quickly but fortunately everybody ..... (rescue).
- 7 Ron's parents ..... (die) when he was very young. He and his sister ..... (bring) up by their grandparents.
- 8 I was born in London but I ..... (grow) up in the north of England.
- 9 While I was on holiday, my camera ..... (steal) from my hotel room.
- 10 While I was on holiday, my camera ..... (disappear) from my hotel room.
- 11 Why ..... (Sue/resign) from her job? Didn't she enjoy it?
- 12 Why ..... (Bill/sack) from his job? What did he do wrong?
- 13 The company is not independent. It ..... (own) by a much larger company.
- 14 I saw an accident last night. Somebody ..... (call) an ambulance but nobody ..... (injure) so the ambulance ..... (not/need).
- 15 Where ..... (these photographs/take)? In London? ..... (you/take) them?

**41.4** Rewrite these sentences. Instead of using 'somebody/they/people' etc. write a passive sentence.

- 1 Somebody cleans the room every day. **The room is cleaned every day.**
- 2 They cancelled all flights because of fog. All .....
- 3 People don't use this road very often. ....
- 4 Somebody accused me of stealing money. I .....
- 5 How do people learn languages? How .....
- 6 People advised us not to go out alone. ....