


# 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*:

*Present simple*

*active:* clean(s)/see(s) etc.                      Somebody **cleans** this room every day.

*passive:* am/is/are cleaned/seen etc.                      This room **is cleaned** every day.

- Many accidents **are caused** by careless driving.
- I'm **not often invited** to parties.
- How **is this word pronounced**?

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*Past simple*

*active:* cleaned/saw etc.                      Somebody **cleaned** this room yesterday.

*passive:* was/were cleaned/seen etc.                      This room **was cleaned** yesterday.

- We **were woken up** by a loud noise during the night.
- 'Did you go to the party?' 'No, I **wasn't invited**.'
- How much money **was stolen**?

Complete the sentences using one of these verbs in the correct form:

damage hold include invite make overtake show  
late write

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

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

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

Write the verb into the correct form, present simple or past simple, active or passive.

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

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

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

## Passive (2) (be/been/being done)

Study the following active and passive forms:

A

### Infinitive

active: (to) do/clean/see etc.

Somebody will clean the room later.

passive: (to) be done/cleaned/seen etc.

The room will be cleaned later.

- The situation is serious. Something must be done before it's too late.
- A mystery is something that can't be explained.
- The music was very loud and could be heard from a long way away.
- A new supermarket is going to be built next year.
- Please go away. I want to be left alone.

B

### Perfect infinitive

active: have done/cleaned/seen etc.

Somebody should have cleaned the room.

passive: have been done/cleaned/seen etc.

The room should have been cleaned.

- I haven't received the letter yet. It might have been sent to the wrong address.
- If you hadn't left the car unlocked, it wouldn't have been stolen.
- There were some problems at first but they seem to have been solved.

C

### Present perfect

active: have/has (done)

The room looks nice. Somebody has cleaned it.

passive: have/has been (done)

The room looks nice. It has been cleaned.

- Have you heard the news? The President has been shot!
- Have you ever been bitten by a dog?
- 'Are you going to the party?' 'No, I haven't been invited.'

### Past perfect

active: had (done)

The room looked nice. Somebody had cleaned it.

passive: had been (done)

The room looked nice. It had been cleaned.

- The vegetables didn't taste very good. They had been cooked for too long.
- The car was three years old but hadn't been used very much.

D

### Present continuous

active: am/is/are (do)ing

Somebody is cleaning the room at the moment.

passive: am/is/are being (done)

The room is being cleaned at the moment.

- There's somebody walking behind us. I think we are being followed.
- (in a shop) 'Can I help you, madam?' 'No, thank you. I'm being served.'

### Past continuous

active: was/were (do)ing

Somebody was cleaning the room when I arrived.

passive: was/were being (done)

The room was being cleaned when I arrived.

- There was somebody walking behind us. We were being followed.

EXERCISES

What do these words mean? Use it can... or it can't... Use a dictionary if necessary.

- Something is washable, it can be washed.
- Unbreakable, it .....
- Portable, it .....
- 4 unusable, .....
- 5 invisible, .....
- 6 portable, .....

Complete these sentences with one of the following verbs (in the correct form):

- 1 ~~cause~~ ~~do~~ make repair ~~send~~ spend wake up
- 2 Sometimes you need have ('might have', 'could have' etc.).
- 3 The situation is serious. Something must be done before it's too late.
- 4 I haven't received the letter. It might have been sent to the wrong address.
- 5 A decision will not ..... until the next meeting.
- 6 I told the hotel receptionist that I wanted to ..... at 6.30 the next morning.
- 7 Do you think that less money should ..... on armaments?
- 8 This road is in very bad condition. It should ..... a long time ago.
- 9 The injured man couldn't walk and had to .....
- 10 It's not certain how the fire started but it might ..... by an electrical fault.

Rewrite these sentences. Instead of using 'somebody' or 'they', write a passive sentence.

- 1 Somebody has cleaned the room. The room has been cleaned.
- 2 They have postponed the concert. The .....
- 3 Somebody is using the computer at the moment. The computer .....
- 4 I didn't realise that somebody was recording our conversation. I didn't realise that .....
- 5 When we got to the stadium we found that they had cancelled the game. When we got to the stadium, we found that .....
- 6 They are building a new ring road round the city. ....
- 7 They have built a new hospital near the airport. ....

Make sentences from the words in brackets. Sometimes the verb is active, sometimes passive. (This exercise also includes the past simple - see Unit 41C.)

- 1 There's somebody behind us. (I think / we / follow) I think we're being followed.
- 2 This room looks different. (you / paint?) Have you painted it?
- 3 My car has disappeared. (it / steal!) It .....
- 4 My umbrella has disappeared. (somebody / take) Somebody .....
- 5 Tom gets a higher salary now. (he / promote) .....
- 6 Ann can't use her office at the moment. (it / redecorate) .....
- 7 The photocopier broke down yesterday, but now it's OK. (it / work / again; it / repair) .....
- 8 The police have found the people they were looking for. (two people / arrest / last night) .....
- 9 A tree was lying across the road. (it / blow down / in the storm) .....
- 10 The man next door disappeared six months ago. (nobody / see / since then) .....
- 11 I was mugged on my way home a few nights ago. (you / ever / mug?) .....