

# Passive Voice

## Grammar Guide

# Introduction

- 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.

*My bike was stolen.*

(= the focus is on the fact that my bike was stolen. I do not know, however, who did it.)

# Use: Agent not important

We often use the passive:

- when the agent (the person or thing which causes an action) is not known:

*She was murdered.*

(= We don't know who did it.)

# Use: Agent not important

We often use the passive:

- when the agent is obvious from the context or from general knowledge:

*She has been sacked.*

(= obviously by her employer)

# Use: Agent not important

We often use the passive:

- when the agent is not important or relevant:

*Wars have been fought throughout history.*

(= Who fought them is not important here.)

# Use: Agent not mentioned

We often use the passive:

- when we wish to avoid mentioning the agent (for example, when we don't want to directly blame any specific person, or we want to avoid personal responsibility):

*I see the washing-up hasn't been done.*

*Oh dear, look, the vase has been broken.*

*Don't blame me. Nothing can be done about it.*

# Use: Agent not mentioned

- By omitting the agent we can describe general feelings, opinions or beliefs rather than those of a particular person or group:  
*São Paulo is said to be the fastest-growing city in South America.*  
*Rio de Janeiro has been described as the most beautiful city in the Americas.*

# Use: Focus on issues

The passive is often used in formal English to:

- focus on the issues rather than on the people involved (this is very common in academic and scientific English):

*The research was carried out over a period of six months.*



# Use: Focus on issues

The passive is often used in formal English to:

➤ describe rules and procedures:

*Answers must be written in ink.*

*Candidates will be interviewed in  
alphabetical order.*

# Use: Focus on issues

The passive is often used in formal English to:

- describe commercial, industrial and scientific processes:

*Most phones are made in China.*

*Components are electronically tagged and transported to the production line.*

*Coffee is produced in Brazil.*

# Use: Focus on issues

The passive is often used in formal English to:

- describe historical, economic and social processes:

*Tribal lands were sold over a period of fifty years.*

*The currency has been devalued twice since the war.*

# Verb Form

➤ Passive is formed with:

**TO BE + Past Participle (v-ed / 3rd form)**

- the object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence
- the form of the verb is changed (*to be + Past Participle*)
- the subject of the active sentence becomes the object of the passive sentence (or is dropped)

# Present Simple Passive

Subject      Verb      Object

➤ Active: *Rita*      *writes*      *a letter.*

➤ Passive: *A letter*      *is written*      *by Rita.*

to be + 3f

# Present Simple Passive Practice

Change active into passive:

➤ A: *He opens the door.*

P:

➤ A: *They don't help you.*

P:

➤ A: *Does the police officer catch the thief?*

P:



# Present Simple Passive Practice

Change active into passive:

➤ A: *He opens the door.*

P: *The door is opened (by him).*

➤ A: *They don't help you.*

P: *You aren't helped (by them).*

➤ A: *Does the police officer catch the thief?*

P: *Is the thief caught (by the police officer)?*