



Passive

The passive voice is used when we are not interested in mentioning who (or what) did something. There are three possible reasons for this: maybe we don't know it, perhaps we don't want to say it or we simply consider it unimportant. In passive sentences the emphasis falls on the action or the object.

1. They broke the window
2. The window was broken

Sentence number 1 is active. Notice that it starts with a personal pronoun followed by a verb and an object → WHO DID SOMETHING. Sentence number 2 is passive → SOMETHING WAS DONE. The listener only knows about the broken window, and not always who broke it. Another important consideration: **you will always find the verb TO BE in a passive sentence** (but also in many active sentences, so be careful!, for example: *She is running* is active). **The verb TO BE will be followed by a past participle.**

Take a closer look at the changes!

ACTIVE: They broke **the window**

PASSIVE: **The window** was broken

There is one way to explicit who did the action in a passive sentence (in our example, to say **who** broke the window). The subject is now called **the agent** and you will find it at the end after **BY**, but very often you will not, as it is secondary information and frequently unnecessary.

They broke the window

The window was broken (BY THEM)

You have seen an example of the passive form in the past, but you can find it in all the verb tenses (present, future, etc.: *The window is broken by hail. The window will be broken by the storm, etc.*)

One more thing to remember: not all verbs in English have a passive form. Intransitive verbs can't be transformed into the passive because they don't have an object which can be used as subject.

Are the following sentences active or passive?

1. Mrs. Smith teaches this class
2. They make a cake every day
3. The letter was written and sent
4. The band will sing your favourite song
5. They will deliver your parcel tomorrow
6. The floors have been cleaned
7. A mistake was made
8. It must be finished by Monday
9. We are going to paint this room
10. Someone has stolen my handbag
11. They didn't see me
12. You will never find it
13. It had never been done before
14. Who was it broken by)
15. They won't hurt you
16. The new school has been closed down
17. The doctors are examining him
18. Your book was being corrected
19. We were given permission to do it
20. They sell cigarettes there
21. The best champagne is produced in France
22. He is not liked by anyone in the office
23. No one will buy this table.
24. My neighbour has been murdered!
25. We are being followed.
26. They can't do it without help

Can you do it?



Answer key:

The **passive** sentences are highlighted.

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