

# PASSIVE VOICE

Form and Use



MARTIN

The **voice** of a verb describes the relationship between the action (or state) that the verb expresses and the participants identified by its arguments (subject, object, etc.).

When the subject is the agent or doer of the action, the verb is in the **active voice**. When the subject is the patient, target or undergoer of the action, it is said to be in the **passive voice**.

**Voice**

**Voice** expresses relationship between:

- the Subject and the Object of the action
- the Subject and the action

Voice (2)

- Transitive verbs (verbs that can take an object) can appear in active or passive sentences.
- Some intransitive verbs followed by a preposition can also appear in the passive.
  - ❖ They **laughed at** him.
  - ❖ He was **laughed at**.

Active/Passive

In active sentence the Subject performs the action, whereas in the passive sentence the Subject receives the action.

**Active/Passive (2)**

## **Active:**

Subject + Verb + Object

## **Passive:**

Object + to be (in the same tense as the active verb) + past participle of the active verb

**Form**

A: We **sell** computers.

P: Computers **are sold**.

A: They **broke** the switch.

P: The switch **was broken**.

A: They **are repairing** the bridge.

P: The bridge **is being repaired**.

**Examples:**



Tense/verb form	Active voice	Passive voice
Present Simple	keeps	is kept
Present Continuous	is keeping	is being kept
Past Simple	kept	was kept
Past Continuous	was keeping	was being kept
Present Perfect	has kept	has been kept
Past Perfect	had kept	had been kept
Future	will keep	will be kept
Conditional	would keep	would be kept
Present Infinitive	to keep	to be kept
Perfect Infinitive	to have kept	to have been kept
Present Participle/Gerund	keeping	being kept
Perfect Participle	having kept	having been kept

## Active tenses and their passive equivalents

We use Passive Voice when:

- The Subject of the active sentence is not known; the Subject is either well-known or irrelevant; or we do not want to mention the doer of the action
- It is more convenient or interesting to stress the thing done than the doer of it

Use

When the agent is mentioned in a passive sentence, it is preceded by **by**:

- ❖ Dufy painted this picture.
- ❖ This picture was painted **by** Dufy.

**Introduction of the Subject**

When a **verb + preposition + object** combination is put into the passive, the preposition will remain immediately after the verb:

- ❖ We must *write to* him.
- ❖ He must be *written to*.
  
- ❖ You can *play with* these cubs quite safely.
- ❖ These cubs can be *played with* quite safely.

**Prepositions with passive verbs**

Sentence with **2 objects** - a direct and an indirect object - could have 2 passive forms:

A: He sent me nothing.

P1: Nothing was sent to me.

P2: I was sent nothing.

P2 is much more usual - when the indirect object becomes the subject of the passive verb.

**Passives of two-object verbs**

- A. J. Thomson and A. V. Martinet, *A Practical English Grammar*, 2<sup>nd</sup>.ed., London: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Z.Murgoski, *English Grammar: with Contrastive Notes on Macedonian*, Skopje, 1997.

**Referenced Literature**