



# ENGLISH GRAMMAR (ACTIVE PASSIVE)

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# Active and Passive Voice (Notes)

**A** The passive of an active tense is formed by putting the verb **to be** into the same tense as the active verb and adding the past participle of the active verb. The subject of the active verb becomes the 'agent' of the passive verb. The agent is very often not mentioned. When it is mentioned it is preceded by **by** and placed at the end of the clause: *The tree was planted by my grandfather.*



**B** Examples of present, past and past perfect passive tenses:

We keep the butter here	The butter is kept here
They broke the window	The window was broken
People have seen wolves in the streets	Wolves have been seen in the streets

**C** The passive of continuous tenses requires the present continuous forms of **to be** which are not otherwise much used:

They are repairing the bridge	The bridge is being repaired
They were carrying the injured player off the field	The injured player was being carried off the field

**D** Auxiliary + infinitive combinations are made passive by using a passive infinitive:

You must/should shut these doors	These doors must/should be shut
They should/ought to have told him (perfect infinitive active)	He should/ought to have been told (passive infinitive)

**E** Other infinitive combinations: Verbs of **liking/loving/wanting/wishing** etc + **object + infinitive** form their passive with the passive infinitive:

He wants someone to take photographs	He wants photographs to be taken
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With verbs of **command/request/advice/invitation + indirect object + infinitive** we form the passive by using passive form of the main verb. *He invited me to go = I was invited to go.* But with **advise/beg/order/recommend/urge + indirect object + infinitive + object** we can form passive in two ways: by making the verb passive as above or by **advise, etc + that.... Should + passive infinitive.** *He urged the council to reduce the rates = The council was/were urged to reduce the rates OR he urged that the rates should be reduced.* **Agree/be anxious/arrange/be determined/determine/decide/demand + infinitive + object** are usually expressed in the passive by that... should. He decided to sell the house = He decided that the house should be sold.



**F Gerund combinations:** Advise/insist/propose/recommend/suggest + gerund + object are usually expressed by in the passive by that... should, as above: *He recommended using bullet proof glass = He recommended that bullet proof glass should be used.*

**It/they + need + gerund** can also be expressed by **it/they + need + passive infinitive**. Both forms are passive in meaning. Other gerund combinations are expressed in the passive by the passive gerund. *I remember them taking me to the Zoo = I remember being taken to the Zoo.*

- In colloquial speech get is sometimes used instead of be: The eggs got (were) broken. You will get (be) sacked if you take any more time off.
- Note that in theory a sentence containing a direct and an indirect object such as *someone gave her a bulldog*, could have two passive forms: *She was given a bulldog OR A bulldog was given to her*. The first of these is much the more usual so the indirect object becomes the subject of the passive verb.
- Questions about the subject of a passive verb are also expressed by an affirmative: *Something was done = What was done? OR One of them was sold = Which of them was sold?* Interrogative verbs in active questions about the object become affirmative verbs in passive questions: *What did they steal?(interrogative) = What was stolen?(affirmative)* Conversely, affirmative verbs in active questions become interrogative verbs in the passive questions: *Who painted it?(affirmative) = Who was it painted by?(interrogative)*. Other types of question require interrogative verbs in both active and passive: *When/where/why did he paint it? = When/where/why was it painted?*



### Uses of Passive: (the passive is used when)

- (a) When it is not necessary to mention the doer of the action as it is obvious who he is/was/will be: The rubbish hasn't been collected. The streets are swept every day. Your hand will be X-rayed.
- (b) When we don't know or don't know exactly, or have forgotten who did the action: The minister was murdered. My car has been moved. I have been told that...
- (c) When the subject of the verb would be people: *He is suspected of receiving stolen goods*. (people suspect him of). *They are suspected to be living in new York*. (people suppose that they are)
- (d) When the subject of the active sentence is indefinite pronoun **One**: *one sees this sort of advertisement everywhere* would be expressed: *This sort of advertisement is seen everywhere*. In colloquial speech we can use the indefinite pronoun **you** and an active verb: *You see this sort of advertisement everywhere*. But more formal English requires one + active verb.
- (e) When we are more interested in the action than in the person who does it: *The house next door has been bought (by a Mr. Jones)* Mr Jones has bought the house next door. Similarly: *A new public library is being built (by our local council)*. In more formal English: They are building a new public library. While a member of the council will of course say: We are/The council is building....
- (f) The passive may be used to avoid an awkward and ungrammatical sentence. *When he arrived home a detective arrested him* = when he arrived home he was arrested (by a detective). *When*



*their mother was ill neighbors looked after the children* = when their mother was ill the children were looked after by neighbors.

- (g) The passive is sometimes preferred for psychological reasons. A speaker may use it to disclaim responsibility for disagreeable announcements: **Employer: Overtime rates are being reduced/will have been reduced.** The active for agreeable announcements will be: **I am/we are going to increase overtime rates.** The speaker may know who performed the action but wish to avoid giving the name. Tom, who suspects Bill of opening his letters may say tactfully: **This letter has been opened!** Instead of **You have opened the letter!**

## Prepositions with passive verbs:

- (a) As already noted, the agent, when mentioned, is preceded by **by**: Dufy painted this picture = this picture was painted by Dufy. What makes these holes? = what are these holes made by? Note, however, that the passive form of such sentences will be: **Smoke filled the room = the room was filled with smoke. Paint covered the lock = The lock was covered with paint.** We are dealing here with materials not the agents.
- (b) 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.** Similarly, with **verb + preposition/adverb** combination: **They threw away the old newspapers = The old newspapers were thrown away. He looked after the children well = The children were well looked after.**

## Infinitive constructions after passive verbs:

- (a) After acknowledge, assume, believe, claim, consider, estimate, feel, find, know, presume, report, say, think, understand, etc. sentences of the type **people consider/know/think etc. that he is....** Have two passive forms: It is considered/thought/known that he is... = He is considered/thought/known to be... Similarly, **people said that he was jealous of her = it was said that he was/He was said to be jealous of her.** The infinitive construction is the neater of the two. It is chiefly used with to be though other infinitives can sometimes be used: **He is thought to have information which will be useful to police.** When the thought concerns the previous action we use the perfect infinitive so that: People believed that he was = it was believed that he was OR He was believed to be. People know that he was = It is known that he was OR He is known to have been.

## After suppose:

- (1) **Suppose** in the passive can be followed by the present infinitive of any verb but this construction usually conveys an idea of duty and is not there for the normal equivalent of **suppose** in active: You are supposed to know how to drive = It is your duty to know/you should know how to drive. He is supposed to be in Paris could mean either 'He ought to be there' or 'people suppose he is there.'



- (2) **Suppose** in the passive can similarly be followed by the perfect infinitive of any verb. This construction may convey an idea of duty but very often does not: *You are supposed to have finished = You should have finished* But *He is supposed to have escaped = people suppose that he escaped*.
- (3) Infinitives placed passive verbs are normally full infinitives: We saw them go out = they were seen to go out. He made us work = we were made to work. **Let**, however is used without **to**: They let us go = We were let go.
- (4) The continuous infinitive can be used after the passive of believe, know, report, say, suppose, think, understand: He is believed/known/said/supposed/thought to be living abroad = people believe/know/say/suppose/think that he is living abroad. You are supposed to be working = You should be working.

**The perfect form of the continuous infinitive is also possible:** He is believed to have been waiting for a message = People believed that he was waiting for a message. You are supposed to have been working = You should have been working.

**Note:** The following tenses cannot be changed into passive voice.

1. Present perfect continuous tense
2. Past perfect continuous tense
3. Future continuous tense
4. Future perfect continuous tense
5. Sentence having Intransitive verbs



## ACTIVE AND PASSIVE TENSES CHART

<p><b>SIMPLE PRESENT and SIMPLE PAST</b> The active object becomes the passive subject. am/is/are + past participle was/were + past participle</p>	
<p><b>Active: Simple Present</b> The movie <u>fascinates</u> me. The movie <u>bore</u>s Jack. The movie <u>surprises</u> them.</p>	<p><b>Passive: Simple Present</b> I <u>am fascinated</u> by the movie. Jack <u>is bored</u> by the movie. They <u>are surprised</u> by the movie.</p>
<p><b>Active: Simple Past</b> The movie <u>bored</u> me. The movie <u>fascinated</u> Jack. The movie <u>surprised</u> them.</p>	<p><b>Passive: Simple Past</b> I <u>was bored</u> by the movie. Jack <u>was fascinated</u> by the movie. They <u>were surprised</u> by the movie.</p>



## PRESENT and PAST CONTINUOUS (PROGRESSIVE)

Passive form:

am/is/are + being + past participle

was/were + being + past participle

### Active: Present Continuous

I am helping Shannon.

June is helping Su and Ling.

### Passive: Present Continuous

Shannon is being helped by me.

Su and Ling are being helped by June.

### Active: Past Continuous

I was cleaning the bathroom.

They were cleaning the bedroom.

Susan was cleaning the kitchen and patio.

### Passive: Past Continuous

The bathroom was being cleaned by me.

The bedroom was being cleaned by them.

The kitchen and patio were being cleaned by Susan.

## PRESENT PERFECT, PAST PERFECT and FUTURE PERFECT

Passive form:

have/has been + past participle

had been + past participle

### Active: Present Perfect

I have mailed the gift.

Jack has mailed the gifts.

### Passive: Present Perfect

The gift has been mailed by me.

The gifts have been mailed by Jack.

### Active: Past Perfect

Steven Spielberg had directed the movie.

Penny Marshall had directed those movies.

### Passive: Past Perfect

The movie had been directed by Steven Spielberg.

The movies had been directed by Penny Marshall.

### Active: Future Perfect

John will have finished the project next month.

They will have finished the projects before then.

### Passive: Future Perfect

The project will have been finished by next month.

The projects will have been finished before then.



## FUTURE TENSES

Passive forms: will + be + past participle  
is/are going to be + past participle

### Active: Future with WILL

I will mail the gift.  
Jack will mail the gifts.

### Passive: Future with WILL

The gift will be mailed by me.  
The gifts will be mailed by Jack.

### Active: Future with GOING TO

I am going to make the cake.  
Sue is going to make two cakes.

### Passive: Future with GOING TO

The cake is going to be made by me.  
Two cakes are going to be made by Sue.



## PRESENT / FUTURE MODALS

The passive form follows this pattern:  
modal + be + past participle

### Active: WILL / WON'T (WILL NOT)

Sharon will invite Tom to the party.  
Sharon won't invite Jeff to the party.  
(Sharon will not invite Jeff to the party.)

### Passive: WILL / WON'T (WILL NOT)

Tom will be invited to the party by Sharon.  
Jeff won't be invited to the party by Sharon.  
(Jeff will not be invited to the party by Sharon.)

### Active: CAN / CAN'T (CAN NOT)

Mai can foretell the future.  
Terry can't foretell the future.  
(Terry can not foretell the future.)

### Passive: CAN / CAN'T (CAN NOT)

The future can be foretold by Mai.  
The future can't be foretold by Terry.  
(The future can not be foretold by Terry.)

### Active: MAY / MAY NOT

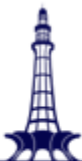
Her company may give Katya a

### Passive: MAY / MAY NOT

Katya may be given a new office



<p>new office. The lazy students <u>may not do</u> the homework. <b>MIGHT / MIGHT NOT</b> Her company <u>might give</u> Katya a new office. The lazy students <u>might not do</u> the homework.</p>	<p>by her company. The homework <u>may not be done</u> by the lazy students. <b>MIGHT / MIGHT NOT</b> Katya <u>might be given</u> a new office by her company. The homework <u>might not be done</u> by the lazy students.</p>
<p><b>Active: SHOULD / SHOULDN'T</b> Students <u>should memorize</u> English verbs. Children <u>shouldn't smoke</u> cigarettes.</p>	<p><b>Passive: SHOULD / SHOULDN'T</b> English verbs <u>should be memorized</u> by students. Cigarettes <u>shouldn't be smoked</u> by children.</p>
<p><b>Active: OUGHT TO</b> Students <u>ought to learn</u> English verbs. (negative <i>ought to</i> is rarely used)</p>	<p><b>Passive: OUGHT TO</b> English verbs <u>ought to be memorized</u> by students.</p>
<p><b>Active: HAD BETTER / HAD BETTER NOT</b> Students <u>had better practice</u> English every day. Children <u>had better not drink</u> whiskey.</p>	<p><b>Passive: HAD BETTER / HAD BETTER NOT</b> English <u>had better be practiced</u> every day by students. Whiskey <u>had better not be drunk</u> by children.</p>
<p><b>Active: MUST / MUST NOT</b> Tourists <u>must apply</u> for a passport to travel abroad. Customers <u>must not use</u> that door.</p>	<p><b>Passive: MUST / MUST NOT</b> A passport to travel abroad <u>must be applied</u> for. That door <u>must not be used</u> by customers.</p>
<p><b>Active: HAS TO / HAVE TO</b> She <u>has to practice</u> English every day. Sara and Miho <u>have to wash</u> the dishes every day. <b>DOESN'T HAVE TO/ DON'T HAVE TO</b> Maria <u>doesn't have to clean</u> her bedroom every day. The children <u>don't have to clean</u> their bedrooms every day.</p>	<p><b>Passive: HAS TO / HAVE TO</b> English <u>has to be practiced</u> every day. The dishes <u>have to be washed</u> by them every day. <b>DOESN'T HAVE TO/ DON'T HAVE TO</b> Her bedroom <u>doesn't have to be cleaned</u> every day. Their bedrooms <u>don't have to be cleaned</u> every day.</p>



**Active: BE SUPPOSED TO**

I am supposed to type the composition.  
I am not supposed to copy the stories in the book.  
Janet is supposed to clean the living room.  
She isn't supposed to eat candy and gum.  
They are supposed to make dinner for the family.  
They aren't supposed to make dessert.

**Passive: BE SUPPOSED TO**

The composition is supposed to be typed by me.  
The stories in the book are not supposed to be copied.  
The living room is supposed to be cleaned by Janet.  
Candy and gum aren't supposed to be eaten by her.  
Dinner for the family is supposed to be made by them.  
Dessert isn't supposed to be made by them.



**PAST MODALS**

The past passive form follows this pattern:  
modal + have been + past participle

**Active: SHOULD HAVE /  
SHOULDN'T HAVE**

The students should have learned the verbs.  
The children shouldn't have broken the window.

**Passive: SHOULD HAVE /  
SHOULDN'T HAVE**

The verbs should have been learned by the students.  
The window shouldn't have been broken by the children.

**Active: OUGHT TO**

Students ought to have learned the verbs.  
(negative *ought to* is rarely used)

**Passive: OUGHT TO**

The verbs ought to have been learned by the students.

**Active: BE SUPPOSED TO  
(past time)**

I was supposed to type the composition.  
I wasn't supposed to copy the story in the book.  
Janet was supposed to clean the living room.  
She wasn't supposed to eat candy and gum.

**Passive: BE SUPPOSED TO  
(past time)**

The composition was supposed to be typed by me.  
The story in the book wasn't supposed to be copied.  
The living room was supposed to be cleaned by Janet.  
Candy and gum weren't supposed to be eaten by her.





Frank and Jane were supposed to make dinner.  
They weren't supposed to make dessert.

Dinner was supposed to be made by them.  
Dessert wasn't supposed to be made by them.

**Active: MAY / MAY NOT**

That firm may have offered Katya a new job.

The students may not have written the paper.

**MIGHT / MIGHT NOT**

That firm might have offered Katya a new job.

The students might not have written the paper.

**Passive: MAY / MAY NOT**

Katya may have been offered a new job by that firm.

The paper may not have been written by the students.

**MIGHT / MIGHT NOT**

Katya might have been offered a new job by that firm.

The paper might not have been written by the students



## Imperative Sentences

### Order:

Do it	Let it be done/ you are ordered to do it
Hand me that pen	You are commanded to hand me that pen
Open the door	Let the door be opened/you are ordered to open the door
Talk to me!	You are commanded to talk to me
Sweep the floor	You are ordered to sweep the floor

### Request:

Please help me	You are requested to help me
Don't disturb me please	You are requested not to disturb me
Please sit near to me	You are requested to sit near to me
Forgive me this time	You are requested to forgive me this time
Save the poor people	It is requested to save people

### Advice:

Use vegetables for better health	You are advised to use vegetables for better health
Serve your father	You are advised to serve your father
Respect your parents	Let your parents be respected
Take medicine regularly	You are consulted to take medicine regularly
Have pleasing ways	You are directed to have pleasing ways



## Prohibition:

Don't break the glass	You are prohibited to break the glass OR you are forbidden to break the glass/let the glass not be broken by you
Don't peep inside the door	You are forbidden to peep inside the door
Never come in	You are prohibited to come in
Never knock at the door again!	You are warned not to knock at the door again
Don't write!	You are prohibited to write



## Permission:

Let him play cricket	Let cricket be played by them
You can come anytime	You are allowed to come anytime
Let him say something	Let something be said by him
Let him sit beside me	He is allowed to sit beside me

