

English Passive vs Active Voice PDF



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In English, sentences can be written in active or passive voice. In the active voice the subject performs the action — "The manager approved the report." In the passive voice the subject receives the action — "The report was approved." The passive is formed with the verb "to be" plus the past participle. Use it when the action matters more than who did it, when the doer is unknown, or when you want to sound formal and objective.

Active vs Passive Structure	Active	Passive
Present simple	The manager approves the report.	The report is approved (by the manager).
Present continuous	The team is reviewing the document.	The document is being reviewed (by the team).
Past simple	The company launched the product.	The product was launched (by the company).
Past continuous	The engineers were testing the system.	The system was being tested (by the engineers).
Present perfect	The board has approved the budget.	The budget has been approved (by the board).
Past perfect	Someone had stolen the data.	The data had been stolen.
Future simple	The team will complete the project.	The project will be completed (by the team).
Modal verbs	They should fix the problem.	The problem should be fixed.

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When to Use the Passive	Situation	Example
The doer is unknown	Someone broke the window.	The window was broken.
The doer is obvious or unimportant	Officials announced the results.	The results were announced.
Formal or objective tone	We conducted three experiments.	Three experiments were conducted.
Focus on the action or result	A mistake caused the delay.	The delay was caused by a mistake.
Scientific and academic writing	Researchers observed the effect.	The effect was observed.
News and announcements	Someone has arrested the suspect.	The suspect has been arrested.
Describing processes	You mix the ingredients first.	The ingredients are mixed first.

Passive with Reporting Verbs	Structure	Example
It is said that...	It is said that + clause	It is said that the company is struggling.
It is believed that...	It is believed that + clause	It is believed that prices will rise.
It is reported that...	It is reported that + clause	It is reported that talks have broken down.
Subject + is said to...	Subject + is said / believed / reported + to infinitive	The company is said to be struggling.
It is thought that...	It is thought that + clause	It is thought that the law will change.

Common Mistakes	Correct	Incorrect
Wrong auxiliary verb	The report was written yesterday.	The report were written yesterday.
Missing past participle	The letter was sent this morning.	The letter was send this morning.
Using passive with intransitive verbs	She arrived late.	She was arrived late.
Unnecessary passive	We cancelled the meeting.	The meeting was cancelled by us.
By-phrase when doer matters	The contract was signed by the CEO.	The contract was signed. (if CEO matters)

EXAMPLES

– ACTIVE: The chef prepared the meal. / PASSIVE: The meal was prepared by the chef.

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EXAMPLES

- ACTIVE: Scientists have discovered a new species. / PASSIVE: A new species has been discovered.
- ACTIVE: They will announce the winner tomorrow. / PASSIVE: The winner will be announced tomorrow.
- UNKNOWN DOER: Someone stole my wallet. / PASSIVE preferred: My wallet was stolen.
- PROCESS: First the data is collected. Then it is analysed. Finally the results are published.
- FORMAL: Three trials were conducted. The results were recorded and the findings were submitted.
- REPORTING: It is widely believed that the economy will recover. / The economy is expected to recover.
- AVOID: The ball was kicked by him. — use active instead: He kicked the ball.