

The Passive in English

The passive voice is used to show interest in the person or object that experiences an action instead of the person or object that performs the action. In other words, the most important thing or person becomes the subject of the sentence.

Exemples :

* A big dog killed my cat. (active)

My cat was killed by a big dog. (passive)

The passive is used here - we are interested in the cat - it is the most important thing in the sentence, we don't care about the dog.

* Someone has stolen my car. (active)

My car has been stolen. (passive)

Again, we care about the car, not so much who stole it.

Sometimes the passive isn't about what is most important - it's simply about changing the sentence structure.

1) To change to the passive voice first find the object:

A thief stole my wallet. A thief stole **my wallet**.

Here the object is 'my wallet'.

2) Now find the verb:

A thief stole my wallet. A thief **stole** my wallet.

Here the verb is 'stole' which is the verb 'to steal'.

3) Find the tense. What tense is 'stole'? It's the verb 'to steal' in the simple past. That means we must then change the sentence to a 'passive' voice and use the simple past.

4) Forming the sentence.

To change a sentence to passive we move the object to the start as the subject (it is the most important thing).

My wallet was stolen by a thief. (This is now a perfect passive sentence in the simple past).

Let's try another one: This man killed our dog.

1) What's the object?

2) What's the verb?

3) What's the tense of the verb?

4) Form the sentence...

The passive voice using the verb 'to clean'

Subject	+ to be (conjugated)	+ past participle	+ rest of sentence
Simple present			
The house	is	cleaned	every day.
Present continuous			
The house	is being	cleaned	at the moment.
Simple past			
The house	was	cleaned	yesterday.
Past continuous			
The house	was being	cleaned	last week.
Present perfect			
The house	has been	cleaned	since you left.
Past perfect			
The house	had been	cleaned	before they arrived.
Future			
The house	will be	cleaned	next week.
Future continuous			
The house	will be being	cleaned	tomorrow.
Present conditional			
The house	would be	cleaned	if they had visitors.
Past conditional			
The house	would have been	cleaned	if it had been dirty.
Infinitive			
The house	must be	cleaned	before we arrive.

Often the word 'by' is used in the passive.

Someone has sent John a mysterious letter. (active) 1: object? (a mysterious letter) 2: verb? (send) 3 tense? (Present Perfect) 4: form the sentence: A mysterious letter has been sent to John by someone.

They made pancakes in the kitchen. (active) 1: object? (pancakes) 2: verb? (make) 3 tense? (Simple Past) 4: form the sentence: Pancakes have been made by them in the kitchen.