**Verbs: Active and Passive Voice**

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The **voice** of the verb tells whether the subject of the sentence performs the action (**active voice**) or is acted upon (**passive voice**). In **passive voice,** the actor (one performing the action) may be named in a prepositional phrase or not named at all. For most disciplines, use the active voice. Scientific writing, however, often uses a passive voice.

EXAMPLES:

* **The students wrote five essays during the quarter.** (ACTIVE voice)

The subject—students—performed the action—wrote.

* **The essays were written by students.** (PASSIVE voice)

The subject—essays—is acted upon.

The doers of the action—students—are NOT the subject of the sentence.

**RULE 1:** Only a **transitive verb** (one that takes an object) may be used in the passive voice.

A transitive verb shows an action that someone or something does something or someone.

* **The earthquake killed hundreds of people.** (ACTIVE voice)
* Correct: **Hundreds of people were killed by the earthquake**. (PASSIVE voice)

(Since **killed** is a **transitive** verb, the sentence can be written in PASSIVE voice.)

* Incorrect: The tornado was happened yesterday.

(“Happened” is an **intransitive** verb; it doesn’t have an object.)

* Incorrect: Mozart’s music is listened.

(“Listened” is an **intransitive** verb; it doesn’t have an object.)

**Here are some examples of Intransitive Verbs** (verbs without objects that cannot be used in passive voice):

agree

appear

arrived

awake

belong

become

collapse

collide

consists of

cost

depend

die

disappear

emerge

exist

fall

go

happen

have

laugh

lie

last (endure)

live

look

occur

remain

resemble

rise

sit

sleep

stand

stay

swim

vanish

wait

**RULE 2:** Passive verbs always consist of a form of the helping verb “**to** **be” + the past participle** **of the main verb**:

* Essays **are written**.

Other helping verbs—have, be, do, will, would, can, could, may, might, should, shall, must, ought to—must also be used with **be, being, or been**:

* Essays **have been** written.
* Essays **are being** written.
* Essays **may be** written, **should be** written, and **will be** written.
* Essays **should have been** written.

**WHEN TO USE PASSIVE:**

* When the actor is unknown: Coffee *is grown* in Columbia.
* When the actor is not important or less important than the object: My son was *awarded* a trophy.
* When the writer wants to have an impersonal tone (which is why it’s often used in scientific and technical writing).

**Active Voice Passive Voice**

**Present**

1. We eat rice. 1. Rice is eaten
2. Maria helps the students. 2. The students are helped by Maria.

**Present Continuous**

1. The children are eating cake. 1. The cake is being eaten by the children.
2. Your uncle is driving your car recklessly. 2. Your car is being driven recklessly.

**Past**

1. The dog ate my homework. 1. My homework was eaten by the dog.
2. He needed money to pay the rent. 2. Money was needed to pay the rent.

**Past Continuous**

1. The dog was eating your homework. 1. Your homework was being eaten by the dog.
2. His brothers were building a magnificent boat. 2. A magnificent boat was being built.

**Present Perfect**

1. The dog has eaten your homework. 1. Your homework has been eaten by the dog.
2. His brothers have built a magnificent boat. 2. A magnificent boat has been built.

**Present Perfect Continuous**

1. Volunteers have been raising funds. 1. Funds have been being raised.
2. People have been casting votes all day. 2. Votes have been being cast all day.
3. We have been jumping the shark. 3. The shark has been being jumped.

**Infinitives:**

Most infinitives don’t have the time element. They are formed with **to + base form of a verb** (e.g. to eat, to sleep, to pray, etc.), but it’s possible to use infinitives in both a **passive** and **past tense** form:

1. The pears needed **to be eaten**. (PASSIVE INFINITIVE: **to be+ past participle**)
2. We needed **to have eaten** the pears. (PAST-TENSE (ACTIVE) INFINITIVE): **to have + past participle**)
3. The pears seem **to have been eaten.** (PAST-TENSE-PASSIVE INFINITIVE: **to have + been + past participle**)
4. The hosts wanted **to have left** already.
5. Mia was lucky **to have been served** tea. (PAST-TENSE-PASSIVE INFINITIVE): **to have + been + past participle**)