



Explanations

Passive: form

- To make the passive we use *be* and a past participle. Compare the active and passive forms in these examples:
- Present simple *The Government **builds** hundreds of houses every year.
Hundreds of houses **are built** every year.*
- Present continuous *The authorities **are questioning** two men.
Two men **are being questioned** by the authorities.*
- Present perfect *We **have chosen** Helen as the new president.
Helen **has been chosen** as the new president.*
- Past simple *The police **arrested** one protester.
One protester **was arrested**.*
- *will* *They **will play** the match on Wednesday evening.
The match **will be played** on Wednesday evening.*
- Notice how the object in the active form (*hundreds of houses, two men, Helen*) moves to the front in the passive sentence and becomes the subject.

Passive: use

- Focus on important information
Compare:
(active) ***The Government** built hundreds of houses last year.*
(passive) ***Hundreds of houses** were built by the Government last year.*

In the active sentence more emphasis is given to who did the action – the Government.

In the passive sentence more emphasis is given to the thing affected by the action – the number of houses.

Emphasized information usually comes at the beginning of the sentence.

- Spoken and written
The passive is used more in writing and formal speech.

Using *by* and *with*

- The person or organization that does the action is called 'the agent'. If we want to say who does the action then we use *by*.
Hundreds of houses were built last year.
*Hundreds of houses were built **by the Government** last year.*
A lot of stones were thrown.
*A lot of stones were thrown **by angry football fans**.*
- The thing that is used to perform an action is called 'the instrument'. If we want to include this we use *with*.
*The windows were broken **with a baseball bat**.*

INTERMEDIATE LANGUAGE PRACTICE

Sentences without an agent

It is not always necessary to mention the agent. There are several reasons for this:

- Agent not known: *Brenda's motorbike **was stolen** last night.*
If we knew who had stolen it, we would mention the name of the person. But we don't know and the agent is not mentioned.
- Agent obvious: *One protester **was arrested**.*
It is not necessary to add the words 'by the police', because we know that it is always the police who do this. However, it is possible to add these words if we want to.
- Agent unimportant: *A lot of English grammar books **are sold** every year.*
Exactly who sells the books is not important. If it was important we could use *by* and the names of the people or shops who sell the books.

Transitive and intransitive verbs

- Verbs which have objects are called transitive verbs (example: *help*). In this sentence, 'the old lady' is the object.
*A young man **helped the old lady** across the road.*
- Verbs which do not have objects are called intransitive verbs (example: *walk*).
*Diane **walks** to college.*
- Dictionaries show this information with T or I. Only transitive verbs can be made passive.
*The old lady was **helped** across the road by a young man.*

Practice

1 Underline phrases which are not necessary in these sentences. Sometimes every phrase is necessary.

- a) My wallet has been stolen by someone.
- b) We were taught by a different teacher yesterday.
- c) Nick was operated on at the hospital by a doctor.
- d) The meal was served by a waiter in a red coat.
- e) We were shown round the museum by a guide.
- f) Two letters were delivered this morning by the postman.
- g) Three men have been arrested by the police.
- h) Yesterday a window was broken by someone.

2 Complete each sentence with a passive verb.

- a) The police questioned George.
George ... *was questioned* by the police.
- b) Millions of people watch this programme.
This programme by millions of people.
- c) They will finish our new house at the end of the month.
Our new house at the end of the month.
- d) They've elected a new president.
A new president
- e) They're rebuilding the damaged stadium.
The damaged stadium
- f) They've closed the mountain road.
The mountain road
- g) Students write most of this magazine.
Most of this magazine by students.
- h) A burglar stole my laptop.
My laptop by a burglar.
- i) Somebody will meet you at the bus station.
You at the bus station
- j) United won the cup last year.
Last year the cup by United.

3 Underline the errors in these sentences. Rewrite each sentence.

- a) Many pet dogs are losing every year.
..... *Many pet dogs are lost every year.*
- b) The injured man was been taken to hospital.
.....
- c) A new bridge is be built across the river.
.....
- d) All the food at the party was ate.
.....
- e) Nothing will being decided before next Saturday.
.....
- f) The match is playing on Friday evening.
.....
- g) The robber unlocked the door by a false key.
.....
- h) This book was writing by Sam's father.
.....

4 For every question, complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first, using no more than three words.

- a) Archaeologists have discovered a new tomb in Egypt.
A new tomb *has been discovered* by archaeologists in Egypt.
- b) The President will open the new sports stadium on Saturday.
The new sports stadium by the President on Saturday.
- c) Picasso painted this portrait.
This portrait Picasso.
- d) They will announce the results of the competition tomorrow.
The results of the competition tomorrow.
- e) They're redecorating our school during the summer holidays.
Our school during the summer holidays.
- f) The police in New York have arrested three terrorists.
Three terrorists in New York.
- g) Our company sells more than 1,000 cars every week.
More than 1,000 cars our company every week.
- h) They're building a new museum in the city centre.
A new museum in the city centre.

5 Rewrite each sentence with a passive verb, and so that the names of people are not mentioned.

a) The authorities have closed the casino.

The casino has been closed.

b) The clubs have postponed the match.

c) People all over the world speak English.

d) The authorities have opened the new swimming pool.

e) Someone left this purse in the classroom yesterday.

f) The city council has banned traffic from the city centre.

g) People have elected a new government.

h) Someone broke into the flat last week.

