

# 8

## GRAMMAR

# Passives

### Uses

- **Transitive and intransitive verbs**

Only verbs with an object (transitive verbs) can be made passive.

*They sent the letter.      The letter **was sent**.*

*They arrived late. (cannot be made passive)*

Verbs with both direct and indirect objects can be made passive in two ways:

*They sent me the letter.      I **was sent** the letter.*

***The letter was sent** to me.*

Some transitive verbs cannot be made passive in some uses. For example *like* and *love*.

*I like this place. (a passive form of this sentence is not possible)*

- **Focus on important information**

By placing the object at the beginning of the sentence, the passive can change the focus of interest in a sentence.

*United **were beaten** by Arsenal. (we are more interested in United)*

The passive is used in a variety of contexts. Notice how the agent (person who does the action) is unimportant, unknown or clear from the situation.

Impersonal statements *Students **are asked** not to smoke.*

When the agent is unknown *My bike **has been stolen!***

(Here we could say *Someone / They have stolen my bike.*)

When the agent is obvious *Mr Jones **will be arrested.***

(Here it is obvious that he will be arrested by the police.)

- **by + agent**

Whether we include the agent, or not, depends on whether that information is important or not.

*This letter **was delivered** this morning.*

(In this case, we do not need to know who delivered it.)

*This letter **was delivered** this morning **by a strange man in a long coat.***

(In this case, we want to describe who delivered it.)

When we describe how something was done, the thing we use is called 'the instrument'.

*The box **was opened with a knife.** (The knife is the instrument.)*

### Reporting verbs

The passive is often used with *say*, *believe*, *understand*, *know* and similar verbs used in reporting speech to avoid an impersonal *they* or *people*.

*People **say that** John Wilson lives in New York.*

*John Wilson **is said** to live in New York.*

Other verb forms can also be reported in this way.

*They say John Wilson is travelling in Africa.*

*John Wilson **is said to be travelling** in Africa.*

*People say John Wilson has arrived in Australia.*

*John Wilson **is said to have arrived** in Australia.*

### **Have / Get something done**

- When someone does some work for us, we can use *have something done*.  
*Last year I **had** new tiles **put** on the roof.*  
*I'm **having** my hair **cut** this afternoon.*
- The same construction can describe bad luck caused by an unspecified person.  
*Peter **had** his car **stolen** last week.*  
*And then he **had** his leg **broken** playing football.*
- Using *get* instead of *have* in the examples above would be more informal.  
*I'm **getting** my hair **cut** this afternoon.*  
Using *get* can also suggest managing to do something difficult.  
*It was difficult but we **got** the painting **done** in the end.*

### **Needs doing**

This is an idiomatic way of expressing a passive sentence where a thing or person needs some kind of action.

*The floor is filthy. It **needs to be cleaned**.*

*The floor is filthy. It **needs cleaning**.*

### **Verbs and prepositions**

The preposition stays with the verb in a passive sentence. In this case, it is possible to end a sentence with a preposition, usually in everyday speech.

*People **shouted at** the prime minister during his speech.*

*The prime minister was **shouted at** during his speech.*

*During his speech the prime minister was **shouted at**.*

### **Other problems**

- *Be born* is a passive form but does not have an obvious passive meaning.  
*I **was born** near Kyoto.*
- *Make* (when meaning *force*) is followed by *to* in the passive.  
*They made David work hard.*  
*David **was made to** work hard.*

## FIRST CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE PRACTICE

### 1 Underline the verb forms which are not possible.

- 1 My car has being stolen.
- 2 Jack was borned on a Thursday.
- 3 Then I realized that none of the guests had been sent an invitation.
- 4 Mary's car is being serviced today.
- 5 Your order will been sent as soon as possible.
- 6 The hole in the road was being repaired when I came home.
- 7 This swimming pool is used by over a thousand people each week.
- 8 When was this church built?
- 9 An address is writing on the back of the envelope.
- 10 Customers are request to ask for a receipt.

### 2 Underline the most suitable verb form in each sentence.

- 1 Their new house hasn't been finished / *wasn't finished* yet.
- 2 The robbers *were arrested* / have been arrested as soon as they left the bank.
- 3 Sue told us her baby *is born* / had been born two weeks earlier than expected.
- 4 If there is too much snow, the match has been cancelled / *will be cancelled*.
- 5 By the time we got there, the rain had stopped / *had been stopped*.
- 6 When *were you told* / have you been told about the new rules?
- 7 Most of the passengers *were swimming* / were swum easily to the shore.
- 8 The winning horse *was ridden* / was riding by Pat Murphy.
- 9 I looked again for the old man, but he *was vanished* / had vanished.
- 10 I don't think that you will be asked / *are being asked* to show your passport.

### 3 Put each verb in brackets into a suitable passive form.

- 1 I'm sorry, but this carpet (already sell) ...has already been sold..
- 2 The old house on the corner (knock down) ..... last year.
- 3 When exactly (John give) ..... his prize?
- 4 Most people agree that America (not discover) ..... by Christopher Columbus, but by the Vikings.
- 5 All complaints about products (deal with) ..... by our customer services department.
- 6 Police confirmed that the murder weapon (since discover) ..... in a nearby lake.
- 7 It (announce) ..... yesterday that the government has decided not to raise income tax.
- 8 Good news! I (ask) ..... to take over as the new manager.
- 9 I don't believe that this play (write) ..... by Shakespeare.
- 10 Ann really likes (invite) ..... to dinner parties.

**4 Rewrite each sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence and begins with the words underlined. Include information on who performed the action.**

- 1 A sudden storm flooded the football pitch.  
~~..The football pitch was flooded by a sudden storm..~~  
 .....
- 2 Vandals scratched the car door.  
 .....
- 3 Scientists in Geneva have discovered a new planet.  
 .....
- 4 The president will open the new National Museum.  
 .....
- 5 A local firm is building the new primary school.  
 .....
- 6 Many of the guests did not use the swimming pool.  
 .....
- 7 A life guard rescued the two children.  
 .....
- 8 More than a million people read this magazine each week.  
 .....

**5 Rewrite each sentence if possible, putting the verb in *italics* in the passive. Mention the agent if necessary.**

- 1 I really *like* this hotel.  
~~..not possible..~~  
 .....
- 2 Jane *won* the poetry competition.  
~~..The poetry competition was won by Jane..~~  
 .....
- 3 Peter's new car *cost* over £20,000.  
 .....
- 4 Martin always *wears* casual clothes.  
 .....
- 5 One of our visitors *lost* this cigarette lighter.  
 .....
- 6 They *haven't decided* the exact time of the match yet.  
 .....
- 7 Most of the guests *had left* the hotel by midday.  
 .....
- 8 Some parents *read* to their children every night.  
 .....
- 9 This bike *belongs* to my sisters.  
 .....
- 10 People *ate* most of the food at the party.  
 .....

## FIRST CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE PRACTICE

- 6** Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

1 Last Thursday we appointed a new marketing manager.

**was**

A new ~~...marketing manager was appointed~~..... last Thursday.

2 Smith Ltd are supplying our company with furniture.

**supplied**

Our company ..... by Smith Ltd.

3 William the Conqueror built the castle in the 11th century.

**by**

The castle ..... William the Conqueror in the 11th century.

4 No decision has yet been made.

**decided**

Nothing ..... yet.

5 People believe that someone murdered Jenkins.

**was**

It ..... murdered.

6 Your hair needs cutting.

**get**

You ought ..... cut.

7 The police were following the suspects.

**were**

The suspects ..... police.

8 No-one has seen Peter since the day of the party.

**been**

Peter ..... the day of the party.

9 We put up a notice about the trip on the notice board yesterday.

**was**

A notice ..... up on the notice board yesterday.

10 People think that an apple a day is good for you.

**to**

An apple a day ..... for you.

**7 Rewrite each sentence so that it contains a form of *have something done*. Do not include the agent.**

- 1 A painter painted our house last month.  
*We had our house painted last month.*.....
- 2 The hairdresser is cutting my hair this afternoon.  
 .....
- 3 Someone has stolen my motorbike.  
 .....
- 4 The dentist has taken out all of Ricky's teeth.  
 .....
- 5 I haven't been to the car-wash for a long time.  
 .....
- 6 The men are coming to put in the new central heating on Saturday.  
 .....
- 7 Someone broke Harry's nose in a fight.  
 .....
- 8 Isn't it time someone fixed your television?  
 .....

**8 Rewrite each sentence so that it contains a passive form, and does not contain the words in *italics*.**

- 1 *Apparently*, Freddie has a wife in Scotland.  
*Freddie is said to have a wife in Scotland.*.....
- 2 *Nobody* knows *anything* about Brenda's family.  
 .....
- 3 *People* think that *someone* started the fire deliberately.  
 .....
- 4 You should *ask* a doctor to see to that cut.  
 .....
- 5 *People* say that Chris was in the army.  
 .....
- 6 My trousers *need* to be pressed before I leave.  
 .....
- 7 *No-one* has signed this letter.  
 .....
- 8 Mary's hair still *needs* cutting.  
 .....

## 9 Put the verb in brackets into a passive or active form, as appropriate.

## Opening of new Gulliver Sports Centre

The new Gulliver Sports Centre (1) *..was.opened..* (open) yesterday by the minister for sport, Angela Thomas. The building in Fairdene Road (2) ..... (use) originally as a covered market, but (3) ..... (fall) out of use in the 1990s and (4) ..... (sell) to Fairdene Council in 2001. It (5) ..... (convert) into a sports hall in 2002. Local schools (6) ..... (play) indoor football and basketball there and keep-fit classes (7) ..... (hold). In 2005 the hall (8) ..... (damage) by a fire which (9) ..... (break out) in the heating system. The hall (10) ..... (not use) for several months, and (11) ..... (remain) empty while discussions (12) ..... (go on) about its future. It (13) ..... (decide) eventually to enlarge and rebuild the hall, and an appeal for money (14) ..... (launch). More than £300,000 (15) ..... (raise) by local people. Two years ago a sportswear company (16) ..... (offer) to pay for the rest of the building work and plans (17) ..... (draw up). The new sports centre (18) ..... (include) a swimming pool, running track and other sports facilities, as well as a food area and sports shop. Anyone can use the sports centre on payment of a small fee. The minister (19) ..... (congratulate) everyone involved, and a demonstration of the facilities (20) ..... (give) by local schoolchildren.

## Key points

- 1 Not all verbs can be made passive. You can check in a dictionary whether the verb is transitive or intransitive.
- 2 The agent is only included if this information is needed.
- 3 Passive forms are often used to give an impersonal view.
- 4 When we change from passive to active the meaning changes slightly. In particular, the focus of interest changes. A passive form may be more suitable in some contexts but unsuitable in others.
- 5 Passive forms tend to be used a lot in scientific and technical language.

## → SEE ALSO

Consolidation 2: Units 5–8