

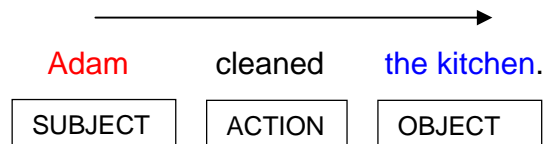


## Active and passive voice

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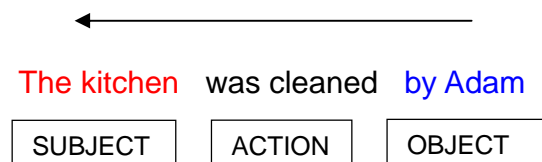
Active and passive sentences usually have the same meaning but the focus is different.

In the active voice the **subject** performs the action expressed and the focus is on the agent that does the action.



In the passive voice the **subject** receives the action expressed in the verb. The **object** of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence. We use a passive verb to say what happens to the subject. The focus of the sentence is on the subject that receives the action.

The passive verb is formed by the verb **to be (are, were, have been, being...)** + the **past participle** of the verb (for more information see the table in the chapter “Formation of the passive form”).





## Active and passive voice

The person who makes the action is introduced by the preposition **by** in the passive sentence. But in some cases the subject of the passive sentence is omitted, this happens when **who** or **what** causes the action is unknown or unimportant. Look at the examples:

| Active                          | Passive                              |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Mary bought a book.             | A book was bought by Mary.           |
| A thief stole my car.           | My car was stolen (by a thief).      |
| I read the message.             | The message is read (by me).         |
| Someone has opened the window.  | The window has been opened.          |
| They are building a house.      | A house <b>is</b> being built.       |
| They are building three houses. | Three houses <b>are</b> being built. |

Look at the position of the different parts of the sentence:

ACTIVE: Alan wrote **a letter** to me.

PASSIVE: **A letter** was written to me by Alan.

ACTIVE: My colleague has just told **me** the news.

PASSIVE: **I** have just been told the news by my colleague.

ACTIVE: Someone showed **him** how to use the mobile phone.

PASSIVE: **He** was shown how to use the mobile phone.

### No one and nobody

ACTIVE: Nobody understands her.

PASSIVE: She is never understood.

She has never been understood.



## Active and passive voice

**ACTIVE:** No one ever says a word.

**PASSIVE:** A word is never said.

### Formation of the passive form

| Active   | Passive   |
|--|---|
| <b>present simple</b><br>She <b>does</b> the homework.         | <b>am/are/is + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>is done</b> (by her).                           |
| <b>past simple</b><br>He <b>did</b> the homework.              | <b>was/were + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>was done</b> (by him).                           |
| <b>present continuous</b><br>She <b>is doing</b> the homework. | <b>am/are/is + being + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>is being done</b> (by her).             |
| <b>past continuous</b><br>He <b>was doing</b> the homework.    | <b>was/were + being + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>was being done</b> (by him).             |
| <b>present perfect</b><br>She <b>has done</b> the homework.    | <b>have/has + been + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>has been done</b> (by her).               |
| <b>past perfect</b><br>He <b>had done</b> the homework.        | <b>had + been + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>had been done</b> (by him).                    |
| <b>future (will)</b><br>She <b>will</b> do the homework.       | <b>will + be + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>will be done</b> (by her).                      |
| <b>future (going to)</b><br>He is going to do the homework.    | <b>am/are/is going to + be + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>is going to be done</b> (by him). |
| <b>infinitive</b><br>She wants <b>to do</b> the homework.      | <b>to be + past participle</b><br>She wants the homework <b>to be done</b> (by her).                  |
| <b>Modal</b><br>He <b>can do</b> the homework.                 | <b>modal + be + past participle</b><br>The homework <b>can be done</b> (by him).                      |
| <b>Gerund</b><br>They <b>are building</b> the house.           | <b>being + past participle</b><br>The house <b>is being built</b> .                                   |



## Active and passive voice

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Present Conditional</b><br>When I have time, I <b>do</b> the filing. | <b>get +past participle</b><br>When I have time, the filing <b>gets done</b> . |
|---|--|

### Intransitive and stative verbs

Intransitive verbs are verbs that have a subject but don't have an object.

Ex: run, fall, die, sleep, arrive

Stative verbs are verbs that show a state, quality or description of the subject. These verbs are related to a state (a situation which doesn't change) and not to an action.

Eg: be, feel, see, have, like, belong, need, love, like, think, believe, want, understand...

Intransitive and stative verbs cannot be used in the passive forms.

**Ex:** I love swimming. (**NOT** Swimming is loved by me)

We have a cat. (**NOT** A cat is had by us)

### Use of passive form

The active form is used more often than the passive because it is clearer to understand who does the action and because you use fewer words to convey the same message. You should use the passive form:

- when the agent performing the action is not known. For example:  
All flights were cancelled due to terrible weather conditions.
- when you want to focus more on the object rather than the subject. For example:  
The president was killed in 1998.