

Passive voice: present and past tenses

CEFR A2-B1 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

The passive always takes a form of be plus the past participle. The tense lives in be, and the doer moves behind by or disappears.

The rule

Present simple passive

- Form: am, is or are plus the past participle.
- Use it for routines and general facts: "The office is cleaned every evening."
- The subject decides be: the room is cleaned, the rooms are cleaned.
- A negative adds not after be: "The windows are not cleaned on Sundays."

Past simple passive

- Form: was or were plus the past participle.
- Use it for finished actions when the doer is unknown, obvious or unimportant: "The bridge was built in 1990."
- The subject decides was or were: the letter was sent, the letters were sent.
- Questions put was or were first: "Was the letter sent yesterday?"

Continuous passives

- Present continuous passive: am, is or are being plus the past participle: "The road is being repaired."
- Past continuous passive: was or were being plus the past participle: "The road was being repaired when we drove past."
- The -ing sits on be, not on the main verb: is being repaired, never is repairing been.
- Continuous passives describe an action in progress, not a finished result.

The agent with by

- Name the doer with by when the information matters: "The song was written by a student."
- Drop the agent when it is unknown, obvious or general: "My phone was stolen."
- People, someone and they often disappear from passive sentences.
- A pronoun after by takes the object form: by me, by him, by them.

Why choose the passive

- The doer is unknown: "The window was broken during the night."
- The doer is obvious: "The suspect was arrested."
- The receiver of the action is the topic of the sentence: "This bridge was designed by a famous engineer."

- The active voice is usually clearer, so choose the passive for a reason, not by habit.

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. The office ___ every evening.

2. The letters ___ yesterday.

3. The road ___ at the moment.

4. The song ___ when we arrived.

5. My phone ___ on the train last week.

6. The novel ___ by a teenager.

7. This bridge ___ in 1990.

8. ___ these rooms ___ every day?

9. The windows ___ during the storm.

10. The results ___ every Monday.

11. The wall ___ by my grandfather.

12. Dinner ___ in the kitchen right now.

13. The emails ___ before I left the office.

14. The suspect ___ outside the bank.

15. The trees ___ by the storm last night.

16. Breakfast ___ from seven to ten.

17. The car ___ when the police arrived.

18. The homework ___ by all the students.

19. This song ___ all over the world.

20. The tickets ___ online last month.

Answer key

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1. **is cleaned** — The present simple passive takes is plus the past participle cleaned.
2. **were sent** — The past simple passive of a plural subject takes were plus the past participle sent.
3. **is being repaired** — The present continuous passive takes is being plus the past participle repaired.
4. **was being played** — The past continuous passive takes was being plus the past participle played.
5. **was stolen** — The past simple passive takes was plus the past participle stolen for the unknown thief.
6. **was written** — The agent follows by, and the verb takes was plus the past participle written.
7. **was built** — The past simple passive takes was plus the past participle built.
8. **Are ... cleaned** — A passive question starts with are and keeps the past participle cleaned.
9. **were not opened** — The negative passive puts not after were and keeps the past participle opened.
10. **are published** — The plural subject results takes are plus the past participle published.
11. **was painted** — The past simple passive takes was plus the past participle painted before the by-agent.
12. **is being cooked** — The present continuous passive takes is being plus the past participle cooked for an action in progress.
13. **were sent** — The past simple passive takes were plus the past participle sent.
14. **was arrested** — The agent is obvious, so the past simple passive was arrested is used.
15. **were damaged** — The past simple passive takes were plus the past participle damaged.
16. **is served** — The present simple passive takes is plus the past participle served.
17. **was being moved** — The past continuous passive takes was being plus the past participle moved.
18. **was finished** — The past simple passive takes was plus the past participle finished.
19. **is played** — The present simple passive takes is plus the past participle played.
20. **were sold** — The past simple passive takes were plus the past participle sold.