

The passive voice

CEFR B1-B2 • 20 questions • A4 / US Letter

Be plus past participle, when the doer matters and when the result matters more.

The rule

The move from active to passive

- Active: subject (doer) + verb + object (receiver). "The storm damaged the roof."
- Passive: receiver + be + past participle + (by + doer). "The roof was damaged by the storm."
- The object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence.
- The doer is optional. Leave it out when it is unknown, obvious or unimportant: "The roof was damaged."

Be in the right tense

- Present simple: is or are plus participle. "The office is cleaned every day."
- Past simple: was or were plus participle. "The letter was sent yesterday."
- Present continuous: is or are being plus participle. "The road is being repaired."
- Past continuous: was or were being plus participle. "The house was being painted."
- Present perfect: has or have been plus participle. "The report has been finished."
- Future: will be plus participle. "The results will be announced tomorrow."
- Modals: modal plus be plus participle. "The form must be signed."

When the passive is the right choice

- The doer is unknown: "My bike was stolen."
- The doer is obvious: "The thief was arrested." (by the police is understood)
- The doer is unimportant: "This bridge was built in 1932."
- The result matters more than the doer: "Three people were injured."
- Formal writing, science and news often prefer the passive because it keeps the focus on the process or the event.

When to avoid the passive

- Do not use it to hide who is responsible: "Mistakes were made" avoids naming anyone.
- Do not use it when the doer is the interesting part: "The goal was scored by Marta" is weaker than "Marta scored the goal".
- Do not stack passives: "The form was required to be signed" is harder to read than "You had to sign the form".
- In everyday speech, active sentences are shorter and clearer. Choose the passive on purpose, not by habit.

Questions, negatives and two objects

- Questions move be to the front: "Was the letter sent?" "Has the report been finished?"
- Negatives add not after be: "The road is not being repaired."
- Verbs with two objects can make two passives: "They gave her a prize" becomes "She was given a prize" or "A prize was given to her". The person usually goes first.
- The get-passive is informal and often sudden: "He got fired", "The window got broken".

Questions

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

1. The bridge ___ in 1932.

2. These shoes ___ in Portugal.

3. The report ___ already ___.

4. The road ___ at the moment, so take another route.

5. The results ___ tomorrow morning.

6. The form ___ by a parent before Friday.

7. My bike ___ from outside the station last night.

8. ___ the letter ___ yesterday?

9. The office ___ every evening at six.

10. She ___ a prize at the ceremony.

11. The window ___ by the storm during the night.

12. This song ___ by millions of people every year.

13. The house ___ when we drove past it last summer.

14. The accident ___ at about noon.

15. The new hospital ___ next year.

16. The book ___ by a journalist who lived in Cairo.

17. English ___ all over the world.

18. The instructions ___ clearly on the box.

19. The office ___ yet. It still smells of paint.

20. He ___ fired last month, and he found a new job quickly.

Answer key

The passive voice · CEFR B1-B2

1. **was built** — Past simple passive: the bridge was built. The doer is unknown or unimportant.
2. **are made** — Present simple passive: are made. The place matters, not the workers.
3. **has ... been finished** — Present perfect passive: has been plus the past participle finished.
4. **is being repaired** — Present continuous passive: is being repaired. The work is happening now.
5. **will be announced** — Future passive: will be plus the past participle announced.
6. **must be signed** — Modal passive: must be plus the past participle signed.
7. **was stolen** — Past simple passive: was stolen. The doer is unknown.
8. **Was ... sent** — Passive question: was plus the past participle sent. The letter receives the action.
9. **is cleaned** — Present simple passive: is cleaned.
10. **was given** — The verb give has two objects. The person can become the subject: she was given a prize.
11. **was broken** — Past simple passive: was broken. The past participle of break is broken.
12. **is played** — Present simple passive: is played.
13. **was being painted** — Past continuous passive: was being plus the participle painted.
14. **happened** — Happen is intransitive, so it cannot be passive. Use the active past simple: happened.
15. **will be opened** — Future passive: will be opened. With the verb open, both active and passive can work, but the passive keeps the focus on the hospital.
16. **was written** — Past simple passive: was written. Wrote is the past simple; written is the participle.
17. **is spoken** — Present simple passive: is spoken.
18. **were printed** — Past simple passive with a plural subject: were printed. "Instructions" is plural, so use were.
19. **has not been cleaned** — Negative present perfect passive: has not been cleaned.
20. **got** — The get-passive is common in informal speech: he got fired. It means the same as he was fired here.