

The passive

Forming the passive

The passive is often used when the action is more important than who or what performed it.

The passive is frequently used in scientific and technical writing.

The passive is formed using a form of 'to be' + past participle.

Tense	Examples of use
Simple present am/is/are + past participle:	The workers are always paid on the first of the month.
Present progressive am/are/is + being + past participle:	The offices are being decorated at the moment.
Present perfect have/has been + past participle:	The car hasn't been repaired since we bought it.
Past tense was/were + past participle:	The book was written by Thomas Wagner.
Past progressive was/were + being + past participle:	My computer was being repaired so I couldn't send an email.
Future will + be + past participle:	Do you think he will be awarded the first prize?
Future perfect will + have + been + past participle:	Next time you come the number will have been changed.
Modal verbs in the passive modal + be + past participle (for the present); modal + have been + past participle (for the past):	He can be found at Millie's Restaurant every Friday. The essay should have been handed in on time!
The passive after verbs of saying, thinking, etc. After passive forms of verbs of saying and thinking (to say, to think, to report, etc.) an infinitive construction is used.	He is said to be lazy. (These kind of sentences are best translated using 'sollen', an adverb like 'angeblich/vermutlich' or 'man sagt, dass'. E.g. Er soll faul sein./Angeblich ist er faul./Man sagt, dass er faul sei.)

The agent	Examples of use
The 'agent' is the person who does an action or the thing that causes it. Passive sentences can be formed with or without an agent. The agent usually takes 'by'.	This book was published in 2006. (no agent) This book was published by Ernst Klett Verlag in 2006. (by + agent 'Ernst Klett Verlag')

Making passive sentences active	Examples of use
Passive with agent → Active	The bill should have been paid by my wife yesterday. → My wife should have paid the bill yesterday.
Passive, no agent → Active, no agent If no agent is mentioned, a suitable one must be found. You can often use 'someone'.	The bill should have been paid yesterday. → Someone/my wife/you/etc. should have paid the bill yesterday.
Making active sentences passive	
Active → Passive with agent	My parents built this house in 1985. → This house was built by my parents in 1985.
Active → Passive, no agent	My parents built this house in 1985. → This house was built in 1985.