

Active and passive verb forms

Part A – Recap on subject, verb, object: Link each word to its correct definition

Subject

person or thing that the action is done to

Object

an action, or a state of being

Verb

person or thing that does the action

The usual order of these in an English sentence is:

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Part B – Passive verbs

Here are two sentences. Underline the subject of each sentence.

Daniel broke his finger.

Daniel's finger was broken.

Sometimes the person or thing that the action is done to appears as the **subject** of the sentence. When that happens, we use a **passive** verb form.

To make a verb passive, use a form of the verb "to be" (*am, are, is, was, were, be*) with the **past participle** of the action verb (*broken, taken, helped, stolen, created, pleased, eaten ...*)

Use the preposition **by** to indicate the person or thing that does the action.

Rewrite each of the following sentences using a passive form of the verb.

1. Greta skilfully milked the cow.
2. The loggers cut down a giant redwood tree.
3. The immune system defends the body from infection.
4. The examiners will carefully mark your papers.
5. A dog bit two children in the park.



Now rewrite these sentences using an **active** form of the verb:

1. Philip was persuaded to come along by Gloria.
2. Drivers who break the speed limit will be caught by automatic cameras.
3. The field was ploughed by the farmer with his blue tractor.
4. The winning goal was scored by Kolbeinn Sigþórsson. *(see footnote)

* The letter "**þ**" is not a mistake, and it's not a **p**. It's the Icelandic way of showing the sound of "**th**". This letter is called "**þorn**" (*thorn*) and it was used in English until the middle ages. Around the sixteenth century most English printers switched to using "**th**", but in Iceland they kept the **þ**.

LO: To recognise and use passive verb forms

Part C: What auxiliary verb do we use?

In informal conversation, it's OK to use "get / got" with a past participle – for example, "It got broken." But in **standard written English**, you **must** use "be / is / are" etc: "It **was** broken."

Don't use get / got in your writing! (Unless it is a character speaking)

Turn the following sentences into **standard** written English, keeping the passive verbs.

1. Flowers get pollinated by insects.
2. We nearly got caught by the caretaker.
3. Metamorphic rocks get made by getting crushed or heated underground.

Part D: Sentences with both a direct and indirect object

Underline the **direct object** and draw a ring round the **indirect object** in each of these sentences.

1. The doctor gave me an injection.
2. The mayor presented Fatima's trophy to her.
3. The man gave Jack five magic beans.
4. Jack gave the man his mother's cow.

If a sentence has two objects, you can choose which one to put first when you use a passive verb.

For example: Aunt Agnes sent me a box of worms.

I was sent a box of worms by Aunt Agnes.

Or: **A box of worms** was sent to me by Aunt Agnes.

Now rewrite sentences 1 to 3 above, using a passive verb form.

Try to create two versions of each, putting the direct or the indirect object first. Then decide which one you think sounds best and put a tick by that one.

Part E: Using active and passive verbs appropriately

Write a paragraph about any **one** of the following topics – it's your choice. Use a **mixture** of active and passive verbs.

At least two, but not all, of your sentences should have passive verbs in them.

You can write about:

Electricity

Tennis

Foxes

Playing in a band or orchestra

A scene in which someone has to clear up a big mess