THE PASSIVE VOICE

Read the text. Are these sentences true or false?

1- The Velocipede was the first bicycle ever built.
2- Bicycles with backrests are slower, but more comfortable.
3- China manufactures about 80 million bicycles a year.

In the 1860, a two-wheeled bicycle with pedals ***was built*** by a Frenchman called Ernest Michaux. Other kinds of bicycle ***had been invented*** earlier in the century, but Ernest Michaux's invention, the Velocipede, was easier to ride and thousands ***were sold*** throughout Europe from 1869. Over the next few decades, several improvements ***were made***: tyres ***were fitted*** to the wheels and later, a chain ***was added*** to the pedals. More recently, bicycles ***have been invented*** with pedals at the front and a seat with a backrest. They're comfortable to ride, and they're fast too. Bicycles arc more popular today than ever before. About 80 million new bicycles ***are manufactured*** every year in China alone!
In cities around the world, cyc1e lanes ***are being built*** and Cycling ***is being encouraged*** by governments. It's possible that in ten or twenty years' time, Cars ***will be banned*** from city centres and only cyclists and pedestrians ***will be allowed***.

Pay attention to the highlighted words.

The stolen Ferrari

Two football fans ***were arrested*** last night near the stadium. The suspects ***were taken*** to the police station for further investigation. They allegedly stole a brand Ferrari.

The owner of the car told the police that the thieves were wearing a football team jersey. After the suspects ***were caught***, the owner of the car ***was called*** to identify the thieves.

However, the owner of the car said that he had made a huge mistake because the car ***hadn't been stolen***; the car ***had been taken*** by his wife to go to a concert because her car was broken.

An apology ***was offered*** to the two football fans; besides, the owner of the car offered to give them 5000 dollars to compensate his mistake. The money ***was not accepted.*** The two football fans ***will be released*** tomorrow morning.

Use of Passive

The passive voice is used to show interest in the person or object that experiences an action rather than the person or object that performs the action. In other words, the most important thing or person becomes the subject of the sentence.

Examples

- The passive voice **is used** frequently. (= we are interested in the passive voice, not in who uses it.)
- The house **was built** in 1654. (= we are interested in the house, not in who built it.)
- The road **is being repaired**. (= we are interested in the road, not in the people who are doing the repairs.)

Sometimes we use the passive voice because we don't know or do not want to express who performed the action.

Examples

- I noticed that a window **had been left** open.
- Every year thousands of people **are killed** on our roads.
- All the cookies **have been eaten**.
- The passive voice is often used in formal texts. Switching to the active voice will make your writing clearer and easier to read.

Passive	Active
A great deal of meaning **is conveyed** by a few well-chosen words.	A few well-chosen words **convey** a great deal of meaning.
Our planet **is wrapped** in a mass of gases.	A mass of gases **wrap** around our planet.
Waste materials **are disposed** of in a variety of ways.	The city **disposes** of waste materials in a variety of ways.

- If we want to say who or what performs the action while using the passive voice, we use the preposition *by*. When we know who performed the action and are interested in him, it is always better to switch to the active voice instead.

Passive	Active
"A Hard Day's Night" **was written by** the Beatles.	The Beatles **wrote** "A Hard Day's Night".
The movie ET **was directed by** Spielberg.	Spielberg **directed** the movie ET.
This house **was built by** my father.	My father **built** this house.

My car **has been stolen**!

Passive voice is used when the focus is on the action. It is not important or not known, however, who or what is performing the action.

Example: My bike was stolen.

In the example above, the focus is on the fact that my bike was stolen. I do not know, however, who did it.

Sometimes a statement in passive is more polite than active voice, as the following example shows:

Example: A mistake was made.

In this case, I focus on the fact that a mistake was made, but I do not blame anyone (e.g. You have made a mistake.).

Form of Passive

Subject + finite form of *to be* + Past Participle (3rd column of irregular verbs)

Example: A letter was written.

When rewriting active sentences in passive voice, note the following:

- the object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence
- the finite form of the verb is changed (*to be* + past participle)
- the subject of the active sentence becomes the object of the passive sentence (or is dropped)

Examples of Passive

Tense		Subject	Verb	Object
Simple Present	*Active:*	Rita	writes	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	is written	by Rita.
Simple Past	*Active:*	Rita	wrote	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	was written	by Rita.
Present Perfect	*Active:*	Rita	has written	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	has been written	by Rita.
Future	*Active:*	Rita	will write	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	will be written	by Rita.
	Active:	Rita	can write	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	can be written	by Rita.
Present Progressive	*Active:*	Rita	is writing	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	is being written	by Rita.
Past Progressive	*Active:*	Rita	was writing	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	was being written	by Rita.
Past Perfect	*Active:*	Rita	had written	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	had been written	by Rita.
Future II	*Active:*	Rita	will have written	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	will have been written	by Rita.
Conditional I	*Active:*	Rita	would write	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	would be written	by Rita.
Conditional II	*Active:*	Rita	would have written	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	would have been written	by Rita.

Passive Sentences with Two Objects

Rewriting an active sentence with two objects in passive voice means that one of the two objects becomes the subject, the other one remains an object. Which object to transform into a subject depends on what you want to put the focus on.

	Subject	Verb	Object 1	Object 2
Active:	Rita	wrote	a letter	to me.
Passive:	A letter	was written	to me	by Rita.
Passive:	I	was written	a letter	by Rita.

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As you can see in the examples, adding *by Rita* does not sound very elegant. That's why it is usually dropped.

Personal and Impersonal Passive

Personal Passive simply means that the object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence. So every verb that needs an object (transitive verb) can form a personal passive.

Example: They build houses. – Houses are built.

Verbs without an object (intransitive verb) normally cannot form a personal passive sentence (as there is no object that can become the subject of the passive sentence). If you want to use an intransitive verb in passive voice, you need an impersonal construction – therefore this passive is called *Impersonal Passive*.

Example: he says – it is said

Impersonal Passive is not as common in English as in some other languages (e.g. German, Latin). In English, *Impersonal Passive* is only possible with verbs of perception (e. g. say, think, know).

Example: They say that women live longer than men. – It is said that women live longer than men.

Although *Impersonal Passive* is possible here, *Personal Passive* is more common.

Example: They say that women live longer than men. – Women are said to live longer than men.

The subject of the subordinate clause (women) goes to the beginning of the sentence; the verb of perception is put into passive voice. The rest of the sentence is added using an infinitive construction with 'to' (certain auxiliary verbs and *that* are dropped).

Passive voice with infinitives

The infinitive passive voice is used after modal verbs and other verbs normally followed by an infinitive.

Examples

- You **have to be tested** on your English grammar.
- John **might be promoted** next year.
- She **wants to be invited** to the party.
- I **expect to be surprised** on my birthday.
- You **may be disappointed**.

Passive voice with gerunds

Gerunds are used after prepositions and verbs normally followed by a gerund.

Examples

- I **remember being taught** to drive.
- The children are excited **about being taken** to the zoo.
- The children are excited **to be taken** to the zoo.
- Most film stars **hate being interviewed**.
- Most film stars **hate to be interviewed**.
- Poodles **like to be pampered**.
- Poodles **like being pampered**.

Using "to be born"

"To be born" is a passive form and is most commonly used in the past tense. However, in some cases, the present or future tense is appropriate.

Examples

- I **was born** in 1976.
- Where **were you born**?
- Around 100 babies **are born** in this hospital every week.
- We don't know on exactly which day the baby **will be born**.

Sometimes the passive is formed using the verb *to get* or *to have* instead of the verb *to be*.

Exercises:

A) **Make these sentences passive. If appropriate. write who or what performed the action**.

Example: Kirkpatrick MacMillan built the first bicycle in 1839.
The first bicycle was built by MacMillan in 1839.

1- People ride bicycles all the time in Oxford.

2- Do they hold the Tour de France every year?

3- They've banned cars from the centre of Rome.

4- Sam Wittingham set the world record for the fastest speed on a bicycle.

5- People are designing faster bikes all the time.

6- They won't allow electric bikes to compete in races.

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B) Write the following sentences into the Passive Voice:

1- He is going to publish a new book.
A new book _____.

2- They haven't started the game yet.
The game _____ yet.

3- They could have broken the window.

The window _____.

4- Have they surprised you?

Have _____?

5- Where were they taking the taxis?

Where _____?

6- We have to sign all the documents.

All the documents _____.

7- Nobody can lift that stone.

The stone _____.

8- Did they sign the contract?

_____?

9- The student had cleaned the board before the teacher came in.

The board _____ before the teacher came in.

10- They didn't return the books.

The books _____.

C) **Complete the sentences using the correct form of the passive voice in the correct tense**

1- The war _____ next week **(DECLARE)**.

2- Your homework _____ by tomorrow afternoon. **(MUST FINISH)**

3- That house _____ since I was a child. **(NOT PAINT)**

4- Smoking _____ in this hotel **(NOT ALLOW)**

5- After all the flights _____ the tourists checked in at the airport hotel. **(CANCEL)**

6- The car _____ for over a week **(NOT WASH)**.

7- He _____ a new contract last year **(GIVE)**

8- This song _____ by the Beatles in 1967. **(WRITE)**

9- The earth _____ if we try hard enough to do something **(CAN SAVE)**

10- The new bridge _____ at the moment. **(BUILD)**

D) Change the sentences to passive by filling in the missing words:

1- People eat 40 million hamburgers every day.

40 million hamburgers _____ every day.

2- People speak English all over the world.

English _____ all over the world.

3- Where did they invent gun powder ?

Where _____ gun powder _____?

4- The police didn't find the missing girl last weekend.

The missing girl _____ last weekend.

5- Tourists don't visit this museum very often.

This museum _____ very often.

6- Workers are building a new fun park in town.

A new fun park _____ in town.

7- When did they translate this book into English ?

When _____ this book _____ into English ?

8- Women send thousands of emails to the star every month.

Thousands of emails _____ to the star every month.

9- Sally brought me some fresh grapes.

I _____ some fresh grapes by Sally.

10- Some dangerous looking men were following me the whole evening.

I _____ the whole evening by some dangerous looking men.

E) <u>Change the following sentences to passive by filling in the correct verb forms:</u>

1. The secretary opens the mail every morning.

   The mail _____ by the secretary every morning.
2. A gardener is watering the flowers.

   The flowers _____ by a gardener.
3. Jimmy walks the dogs every day.

   The dogs _____ by Jimmy every day.
4. Heavy rain had caused the flood.

   The flood _____ by heavy rain.
5. Police officers were examining the evidence.

   The evidence _____ by police officers.
6. A spokesman gave an interview to the reporters.

   The reporters _____ an interview by a spokesperson.
7. A guide will take you to your seat.

   You _____ to your seat by a guide.
8. We are going to announce the results on Friday.

   The results _____ on Friday.
9. The new manager has made some changes.

   Some changes _____ by the new manager.
10. The students are making arrangements for the party.

    Arrangements _____ for the party.
11. They clean the windows every week.

    The windows _____ every week.
12. They had invited him to the cinema.

    He _____ to the cinema.

F) **Fill in the correct tense. Use passive or active according to the context.**

1. When she heard that her dog _____ (**KILL**), she burst into tears.
2. We hope that the missing money _____ (**FIND**) soon.
3. A new bridge _____ (**BUILD**) at the moment.
4. I didn't go to the party because I _____ (**INVITE**)
5. When she discovered that Tom _____ (**EAT**) all the biscuits she got very angry.
6. It's no use trying. You _____ (**WASTE**) your time.
7. Shakespeare _____ (**WRITE**) many other plays apart from Hamlet.
8. A million people _____ (**VISIT**) the cathedral every year.
9. John Higgins _____ (**AWARD**) a science prize last month.
10. A lot of money _____ (**SPEND**) on weapons nowadays**.**