

The Passive Voice

The *passive voice* is used as an alternative to the *active voice*. It can be applied to multiple verb forms, and is used for a variety of reasons.

To form the passive, you need the verb 'be' + the past participle of the active verb. You must also remember not to change the tense that is in the active sentence. So, you may also need the verb 'have' and verb+ing.

Form

Past simple:

I made a mistake. (active)

A mistake was made. (passive) *was = past simple of 'be'*

Future simple:

The Barcelona Chairman will give a speech tomorrow. (active)

A speech will be given tomorrow. (passive) *will be = future simple of 'be'*

There are various reasons why the passive voice is used:

1. To put emphasis on the object - rather than the subject.

Every morning, the cleaner **opens** all doors. (active)

The doors **are opened** every morning. (passive)

2. To hide the 'agent' (the person or thing responsible for the action)

I **made** a very big mistake. (active)

A very big mistake **was made**. (passive)

3. The agent is obvious and there is no need to mention it.

Detectives **are investigating** crimes in the area. (active)

Crimes in the area **are being investigated**. (passive)

4. The agent is unknown.

Someone **has stolen** the Mona Lisa. (active)

The Mona Lisa **has been stolen**. (passive)

5. To sound more formal - academic writing.

Scientists **claim** that natural ingredients can eliminate diseases. (active)

It **is claimed** (by scientists)* that natural ingredients can eliminate diseases. (passive)

* This would normally be supported by a citation. Hence, no need to mention 'scientists' as the citation would specify that.

Please notice that the tense is unchanged from the active to passive sentence.

Function

All passive forms

The doctors had saved her life. (past perfect simple / active)

Her life had been saved. (past perfect simple / passive)

Vets had been treating the cat for six months. (past perfect continuous / active)

The cat had been being treated for six months. (past perfect continuous / passive)

This is not common and sounds quite unusual. It would be better to say, The cat had been receiving treatment for six months.

I made a very serious mistake. (past simple / active)

A very serious mistake was made. (past simple / passive)

The scientist was recording the results of the experiment. (past continuous / active)

The results of the experiment were being recorded. (past continuous / passive)

The newspaper has published an article on the housing crisis. (present perfect simple / active)

An article on the housing crisis has been published. (present perfect simple / passive)

The journalist has been reporting the scandal for two weeks. (present perfect continuous / active)

The scandal has been being reported for two weeks. (present perfect continuous / passive)

This is not common and sounds quite unusual. It would be better to say, The scandal has been reported on for two weeks.

People think that global warming is the biggest threat to mankind. (present simple / active)

It is thought that global warming is the biggest threat to mankind. (present simple / passive)

Global warming is thought to be the biggest threat to mankind. (present simple / passive)

Jose Mourinho is holding a press conference live on TV. (present continuous / active)

A press conference is being held live on TV by Jose Mourinho. (present continuous / passive.)

By the end of this year, we will have read 14 books. (future perfect simple / active)

14 books will have been read by the end of this year. (future perfect simple / passive)

By next month, we will have been planning this project for a year. (future perfect continuous / active)

By next month, this project will have been being planned for a year. (future perfect continuous / passive)

This is not common and sounds quite unusual. It would be better to say, By next month, this project will have been planned for, for a year.

Our teacher will give us the project outline next week. (future simple / active)

The project outline will be given to us next week. (future simple / passive)

In a few hours, I will be cooking dinner. (future continuous / active)

In a few hours, dinner will be being cooked. (future continuous / passive)