***The Passive Voice***

***Introduction***

Voice refers to the form of a verb that indicates when a grammatical subject performs the action or is the receiver of the action.

When a sentence is in the active voice*, the subject performs the action*; in the passive voice, *the subject receives the action*. In academic writing, it is generally preferred to choose an active verb and pair it with a subject that names the person or thing performing the action. Active verbs are stronger and usually more emphatic than forms of the verb “be” or verbs in the passive voice.

**1. Active to Passive**

To change a sentence from the active voice to the passive voice:

• The object of the active voice sentence becomes the subject of the passive voice sentence.

Agatha Christie wrote **this book.**

**This book** was written by Agatha Christie.

• We change the main verb of the active voice sentence into the passive voice. The tense remains unchanged.

• The subject of the active voice sentence becomes the agent of the passive sentence. It is placed after the past participle and it is preceded by the preposition by.

**Examples:**

* He delivers the letters. The letters are delivered.
* He is delivering the letters. The letters are being delivered.
* He has delivered the letters. The letters have been delivered.
* He has to deliver the letters. The letters have to be delivered.
* He must deliver the letters. The letters must be delivered.

**2. Uses of the Passive Voice**

1. **When we don't know or have forgotten who did the action**

E.g: - A laptop *was stolen* from the classroom.

- Three people *have been killed* in the park.

- I *have been told* that she left the country.

**2. When the person who does the action is obvious or unimportant**

E.g: - She is being treated for cancer. (By doctors and nurses, obviously)

- Bill Clinton was elected president in 1993. (By the country's population, obviously)

- All articles are proofread before publication. (Who proofreads them

is not important… probably a team of editors).

- Is this room cleaned everyday (not important who clean it)

**3. When we want to give MORE emphasis to the receiver of the action than**

**to the doer.**

E.g: - The Taj Mahal was built by the emperor Shah Jahan in memory

of his wife. (We are learning primarily about the Taj Mahal, so we

keep the attention on it)

- This software has been used by more than 50,000 small businesses.

(we want to emphasize how great the software is; the small

businesses are a secondary detail)

**4. When the person who does the action is "people in general"**

E.g: - Chinese is seen as a very difficult language to learn.

- It was once believed that the sun revolved around the earth

**5. In factual or scientific writing:**

E.g: -The chemical is placed in a test tube.

**6. In formal writing instead of using someone/one/ people/ they**

(these can be used in speaking or informal writing):

E.g: - **The brochure will be finished next month. (Preferable)**

(Someone will finish the brochure next month)

- **This add is seen everywhere. (Preferable)**

(One sees this add everywhere)

- **He is thought to be innocent. (Preferable)**

(People think that he is innocent)

**7. To avoid awkward or ungrammatical sentences (it is usually done by avoiding**

**A change of subject)**

E.g: - When he arrived home, a detective arrested him. **(Awkward)**

- **When he arrived home, he was arrested. (Preferable)**

- Three books are used regularly in the class. Dr. Bell wrote the books.

- **Three books are used regularly in the class. The books were written**

**by Dr. Bell**.

**8. When the subject is very long:**

E.g: - I was surprised by how well the students did in the test. (More natural

than: 'how well the students did in the test surprised me')

**9. When want to deflect criticism or blame for our own behaviour.**  
   
 E.g: *-* Mistakeswere made*.*

**10. When we want to sound objective or avoid using the subject “I”**

E.g:Studies have shown . . .

It is well-known . . .

Hamlet is considered . . .

**Note:**

1. **Verbs which have two objects (direct/indirect) can have two passive forms:**

E.g: Somebody gave the police the information.

The police were given the information. **(This is more common)**

The information was given to the police

They have offered me the job.

I have been offered the job.

The job has been offered to me.

1. **If two verbs in the passive voice are connected with and, do not repeat be.**

E.g: The Oscar ceremony is televised and seen by millions of people.

1. **Intransitive verbs (verbs which do not take objects) cannot be used to form passive sentences.**

E.g: John came to the meeting. \*John was come to the meeting (incorrect).

The cat died in the street. \*The cat was died in the street (incorrect).

**3. Verb+-ing or to- infinitive: passive forms**

**1. Infinitive Combinations**

1. **Verbs of liking/loving/wanting/wishing+ object + infinitive= the passive is formed with the passive infinitive.**

E.g: He wants someone to take photographs.

He wants photographs to be taken by someone.

1. **With verbs of command/request/ advice/invitation+ Indirect object +infinitive= we use the passive of the main verb.**

E.g: He invited me to go. He advised me to leave.

I was invited to go. I was advised to leave

**But, with advise/beg/order/recommend/urge+ IO +infinitive the passive can be formed in two ways: by making the main verb passive, as above, or advise, etc. +that…should**

E.g: He urged the council to reduce the rates.

The council was urged to reduce the rates.

**He urged that the rates should be reduced.**

**The verbs agree/be anxious/arrange/ be determined/determine/decide/**

**demand+ infinitive + object are usually expressed by that…should**

E.g: He decided to sell the house.

He decided that the house should be sold.

1. **Verb +to infinitive+ object**

E.g: His colleagues started to respect Tim.

Tim started to be respected by his colleagues.

People came to recognise her as the best student.

She came to be recognised as the best student.

Other verbs like this include: **appear, begin, come, continue, seem, tend**.

1. **Gerund Combinations**
2. **-advise/insist/propose/recommend/suggest+gerund+object are usually expressed by that…should**

E.g: He recommended using bulletproof glass.

He recommended that bulletproof glass should be used.

1. **Verb+ object+-ing**

E.g: They saw him climbing over the fence.

He was seen climbing over the fence.

1. **Other gerund combinations are expressed in the passive by the passive gerund.**

E.g: I remember them taking me to the zoo.

I remember being taken to the zoo.

**4. Impersonal passive**

It is a formal way of reporting thoughts, sayings, beliefs and opinions, particularly if we want to avoid mentioning who said what we are reporting.

A common way of reporting what is said is to use **it + passive verb + *that-clause*** or to use **subject + passive verb + *to-infinitive:***

E.g: His parents say that he goes to school by bus. (Active)

**It is said that** he goes to school by bus.  **(Passive)**

**He is said to go** school by bus. **(Passive)**

People believe that the boy is wearing blue jeans.

**It is believed** that he is wearing blue jeans.

**He is believed to be wearing** blue jeans.

Verbs that can be used in this pattern include **agree, allege, announce, assume, calculate, claim, consider, decide, declare, discover, estimate, expect, feel, find, know, mention, propose, recommend, say, show, suggest, suppose, think, understand.**

When the thought concerns a previous action, the perfect infinitive **(to have+past participle)** can be used.

E.g: People say that this team played well in the match.

This team is said to have played well in the match

They report that the murderer killed five men.

Five men are reported to have been killed.

**Note:**

* The passive form of sentences which deal with materials (not agents) do not end with ‘by’, but with “with”

E.g: smoke filled the room. The room was filled with smoke.

Paint covered the lock. The lock was covered with paint.

* When a verb +preposition+ object combination is put into the passive, the preposition remains after the verb.

E.g: We must write to him. He must be written to.

You can play with these cubs quite safely.

These cubs can be played with quite safely.