

Passive Voice

We form the passive with the verb *to be* and the *past participle* of the main verb.

	Active Voice	Passive Voice
Present Simple	They serve dinner at 6:00.	Dinner is served at 6:00.
Present Continuous	They are serving dinner now.	Dinner is being served now.
Past Simple	They served dinner.	Dinner was served .
Past Continuous	They were serving dinner.	Dinner was being served .
Future Simple	They will serve dinner.	Dinner will be served .
Present Perfect	They have served dinner.	Dinner has been served .
Past Perfect	They had served dinner.	Dinner had been served .
Future Perfect	They will have served dinner.	Dinner will have been served .
Present infinitive	They should serve dinner.	Dinner should be served .
Perfect infinitive	They should have served dinner.	Dinner should have been served .
<i>-ing</i> form	He likes people serving his dinner.	He likes his dinner being served .
Perfect <i>-ing</i> form	Having served dinner, ...	Dinner having been served , ...
Modals + be + p.p.	You must serve dinner.	Dinner must be served .

10.1 The passive

Form

am/is/are was/were has/have been will	+ <i>-ed</i> (past participle)
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The past participle of regular verbs ends in *-ed*. There are many common **irregular past participles**. See the list on p158.

Present

*English **is spoken** all over the world.*

*100 million mobile phones **are thrown away** every year.*

*Fiat cars **aren't made** in France.*

*Where **is coffee grown**?*

Past

*The first text message **was sent** in 1989.*

*They **weren't injured** in the accident.*

*When **was television invented**?*

We use the Passive:

- when **the agent** (the person who does the action) is **unknown, unimportant** or **obvious** from the context. *The door **had been locked**.* (we don't know who locked it – unknown agent) *Repairs **are being made** to the car.* (by the mechanic – obvious agent)
- when we are interested more in the action than the person who carries it out, such as in **news reports, formal notices, instructions, processes, headlines, advertisements, etc.** *The whole area **was evacuated**.* (news report) *Breakfast **is served** from 6.00 to 10.30.* (formal notice)
- to make **statements more formal or polite.** “My new dress **has been ruined**”. (more polite than saying “You ruined my dress”).
- to put **emphasis** on the agent. *The Pyramids were built **by the ancient Egyptians**.*

- We use **by + agent** to say who or what carries out the action. We use **with + instrument / material / ingredient** to say what the agent used to carry out the action. *The cake was made **by Ann**.* *It was made **with eggs, flour and butter**.*

- Only transitive verbs (verbs followed by an object) can be changed into the passive:

active: *Mary **feeds** the dogs.* (transitive verb)

passive: *The dogs **are fed** by Mary.*

but: *They **sleep** early every night.* (The verb sleep in this sentence is intransitive; not followed by an object. The sentence cannot be changed into the passive.)

Some transitive verbs, such as *have, fit, suit, resemble, etc.* cannot be changed into the passive. *She **resembles** her father in many ways.*

Changing from Active into Passive

To change a sentence from active into the passive:

- the object of the active sentence becomes the subject in the passive sentence,
- the active verb remains in the same tense, but changes into a passive form,
- the subject of the active sentence becomes the agent, and is either introduced with the preposition *by* or omitted.

	subject	verb	object
active	<i>The mayor</i>	<i>opened</i>	<i>the new school.</i>

	subject	verb	agent
passive	<i>The new school</i>	<i>was opened</i>	<i>by the mayor.</i>

Active to passive

- 4 Read the text again. How are these verbs expressed in the passive?
- 1 Martin Cooper **made** the first mobile phone call in 1973.
 - 2 Almost six billion people worldwide **own** mobile phones.
 - 3 Shops in the UK **sell** 30 million phones every year.
 - 4 They **have sold** camera phones since 2002.
 - 5 Engineers **have added** a lot of amazing features.
 - 6 They **decorate** the Goldstriker phone with over 550 diamonds.
 - 7 We **throw away** 100 million mobile phones every year.
 - 8 Some people believe that mobile phones **will** eventually **replace** all landline phones.

Answers and tapescript

- 1 The first mobile phone call **was made** in 1973 by Martin Cooper.
- 2 Mobile phones **are owned** by almost six billion people worldwide.
- 3 30 million phones **are sold** in the UK every year.
- 4 Camera phones **have been sold** since 2002.
- 5 A lot of amazing features **have been added**.
- 6 The Goldstriker phone **is decorated** with over 550 diamonds.
- 7 100 million mobile phones **are thrown away** every year.
- 8 Some people believe that eventually all landline telephones **will be replaced** by mobile phones.