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Active voice - passive voice

Active voice	The man loves the woman.
Passive voice	The woman is loved by the man.

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Active voice - passive voice

The active voice

The active voice is used when the element doing the action is the subject and the element receiving the action is the object.

Element doing action + predicate + element receiving the action.

The tense of the predicate has nothing to do with the voice of the verb. Most tenses can be used in both the active and passive voice. When using the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action.

The manager + presents + the data. (present tense)

subject | predicate | object

The manager + presented + the data. (past tense)

…likewise *has presented, will present,* etc.

2. Halbjahr 2026
English Intensive Week A2 Refresher
262-40691, Mo-Fr, 08.45 – 14.00 Uhr

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The passive voice

The passive voice is used when the element receiving the action is the subject of the sentence. The element doing the action may or may not be mentioned as the object *(by)* at the end of the sentence.

Element receiving the action + predicate (form of to be + past participle of the verb) + by + element doing the action.

In the passive voice, the subject of the sentence is the element receiving the action. As the subject it is always in the nominative case. That is different from the use of some German verbs in the passive voice.

German: ***Mir*** *wird geholfen.*

subject predicate

English: ***I*** *am helped.*

Examples

The sales team + is coached + by + an external expert.

Our products + were praised + by + our customers.

The office + will be cleaned + tomorrow.

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Active voice - passive voice

Tense of the passive voice	In the passive voice, the defining element for tense is the form of ***to be***. The main verb always appears in its past participle format (*to take - took - **taken***).
Examples	*The sales team + is coached + by + an external expert.*
	is = present tense
	Our products + were praised + by + our customers.
	were = past tense
	The office + will be cleaned + tomorrow.
	will be = future tense
	The office + has been cleaned + this morning.
	has been = present perfect

Active voice - passive voice

Difference between the passive voice and the past tense

With verbs, the past participle format of which is identical with their past tense format (regular verbs, *to teach* - ***taught - taught***), it is easy to confuse the past tense and the passive voice.
To understand if you are using the passive voice rather than the active voice with a past tense verb, determine the element performing the action.

Our secretary received the memo before everybody else.

The secretary is performing the action: Active voice.

The memo was sent out the next day.

We do not know the element performing the action, but the memo is the element receiving the action: Passive voice.

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Active voice - passive voice

Active - passive

To convert a sentence from the active voice to the passive voice -

1. The object becomes the subject
2. The tense is defined by the corresponding form of *to be*
3. The main verb of the predicate appears as past participle

(Optional): 4. The subject becomes the object following the preposition ***by.***

Example

My neighbour drives a BMW.

1. The object becomes the subject

A BMW*…*

2. The tense is defined by the corresponding form of *to be*

A BMW ***is****… (present tense)*

3. The main verb of the predicate appears as past participle

A BMW is ***driven****…*

4. The subject becomes the object following the preposition ***by.***

A BMW is driven ***by my neighbour****.*

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Exercises

Fill in the gaps with the passive form (present tense)

1. Millions of books (to buy) by fans every year.

Millions of books **are bought** by fans every year.

2. Board games (not, to play) by many people.

Board games **aren't played** by many people.

3. The gallery (to know) for its world-class exhibitions.

The gallery **is known** for its world-class exhibitions.