

24 The passive

In most sentences, the subject carries out an action and the object receives it, or the result of it. In passive sentences, this is reversed: the subject receives the action.

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24.1 THE PRESENT SIMPLE PASSIVE

Passive sentences take emphasis away from the agent (the person or thing doing the action), and put it on the action itself, or the person or thing receiving the action.

In the present simple passive, the present simple verb becomes a past participle.



The focus is on "many people."
Many people study this book.

The subject of the active sentence is "many people."

This book is studied by many people.

The focus is on "this book," which is the subject of the passive sentence.

"Study" changes to "is studied."

FURTHER EXAMPLES

The passive is used when the agent is obvious, unknown, or unimportant. It is also useful when describing a process where the result of the action is important.

The speaker doesn't mention the agent because the verb obviously refers to the police.

Criminals are arrested every day in this town.

The agent is not mentioned because the process is more important.

Are the posters printed on quality paper?

"Be" and the subject swap places to form questions.

HOW TO FORM

All passives use a form of "be" with a past participle. The agent (the thing doing the action) can be introduced with "by," but the sentence would still make sense without it.



24.2 THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS PASSIVE

The present continuous passive is used to refer to ongoing actions.



PRESENT CONTINUOUS

Developers **are building** lots of new houses in the area.

Lots of new houses **are being built** in the area.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS PASSIVE

FURTHER EXAMPLES

You can't use the pool today because it **is being cleaned**.



I **am being interviewed** by a news channel tomorrow.



The robbery **is being investigated** by the police.



Don't worry, the food **is being cooked** as we speak.



We're living in a trailer while our house **is being rebuilt**.



Posters for the concert **are being put up** all over town.



The course **is being taught** by a well-known scientist.



I have to walk to work while my car **is being repaired**.



HOW TO FORM

SUBJECT

"AM / IS / ARE"

"BEING"

PAST PARTICIPLE

REST OF SENTENCE

New houses

are

being

built

in the area.

The thing that receives the action.

Present simple of "be."

The past participle describes what happens to the subject.