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PASSIVE VOICE

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WHAT IS PASSIVE VOICE?

- ✦ Clauses might be active or passive:
- ✦ ACTIVE: You rang the bell.
- ✦ In active voice, the subject establishes what the clause is about, referring to something the listener or reader already knows.
- ✦ It is a construction we use when we want to talk about an action, but we are not so interested in saying you or what does/did it
 - ✦ The bell was rung.

WHEN DO WE USE PASSIVES?

- ✦ In passive voice the subject still establishes what the clause is about, but it is the recipient of the action, not the agent
- ✦ We choose passives when new or important information is:
 - ✦ What happened to the subject: I've been sacked
 - ✦ Who or what did it: Turandot was composed by Puccini
 - ✦ How it was done: the conference was badly organised.

USE OF PASSIVES



- ✦ Passives without “agents” are common in academic and scientific writing, because the agent is unknown
 - ✦ It is sometimes argued...
- ✦ We use it to avoid very long subjects:
 - ✦ Many people have been refused help by the new commission which was set to look into possible abuses in the allocation of social housing.

USE OF PASSIVES



- ✦ To describe processes:
 - ✦ The beans are picked in late summer and are left to dry in the sun.
- ✦ Official rules and procedures.
 - ✦ Application should be made in writing.

USE OF PASSIVES



- ✦ To describe procedure in formally reporting scientific experiments
 - ✦ Thirty-eight subjects were interviewed in the first round.
- ✦ To avoid the implication of personal involvement
 - ✦ The vase got broken, Mum.

USE OF PASSIVES



- ✦ With certain verbs when the person who did the action is unimportant
 - ✦ We have been inundated with gestures of support.
- ✦ It is often used in an official, impersonal style.

Number of passives according to genre



DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ACTIVE AND PASSIVE SENTENCES

THOMSON, SIR JOSEPH JOHN
(1846-1940)

British physicist and mathematician and head of a group of researchers at the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge. Thomson discovered the electron. He is regarded as the founder of modern physics.

Compare these two sentences, one from each paragraph.

Thomson discovered the electron.

ELECTRON

A subatomic particle and one of the basic constituents of matter. The electron was discovered by J.J. Thomson. It is found in all atoms and contains the smallest known negative electrical charge.

The electron was discovered by Thomson.

PASSIVE SENTENCES WITHOUT AN AGENT



- ✦ In passive sentences we only mention the agent if it is important new information.
- ✦ There is often no need to mention it.
 - ✦ Nine million cigarettes are smoked.

AGENT IN PASSIVES



- ✦ The agent may not be relevant.
 - ✦ A large number of James Bond films have been made.

- ✦ Sometimes we do not know the identity of the agent.
 - ✦ My car was stolen.

VERBS WHICH CAN AND CANNOT BE PASSIVE

- ✦ Happen, sleep, run
- ✦ Some state verbs: be, belong, exist, have, lack, resemble, seem, suit
- ✦ Some verbs can be action or state verbs: measure, weigh, fit, cost. They can be passive when they are action verbs.
- ✦ Some state verbs can be passive: believe, intend, know, like, love, need, own, understand, want, mean.

Tense and aspect



Present simple

They play the match.

The match is played.

Present continuous

They are playing the match.

The match is being played.

Present perfect

They have played the match.

The match has been played.

Past simple

They played the match.

The match was played.

Past continuous

They were playing the match.

The match was being played.

Past perfect

They had played the match.

The match had been played.

Future

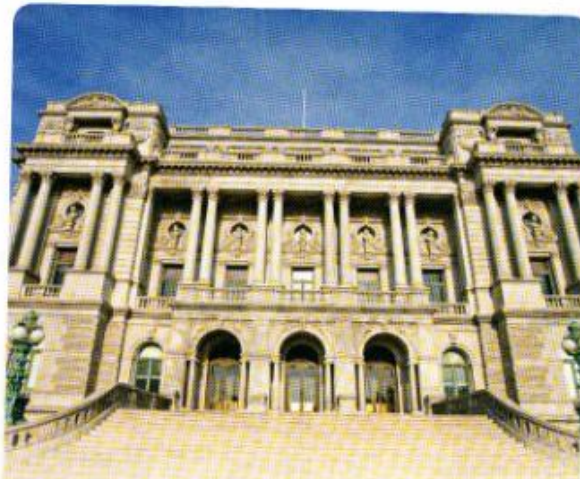
They will play the match.

The match will be played.

They are going to play the match.

The match is going to be played.

FIND THREE EXAMPLES OF PASSIVES



Did you know ... ?

- More than 32 million books are kept in the Library of Congress in Washington DC.
- Every book that is published in the UK is sent to the British Library free of charge.
- 57 books are bought every second by shoppers in the USA.
- Before 1450, books weren't printed – they were copied by hand.
- The first Harry Potter manuscript was offered to twelve publishers – and they all said no!
- The novel *Gadsby: Champion of Youth* was written in 1939 by Ernest Vincent Wright without using the letter 'e'.
- A copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was sold for \$1.5 million in New York.

COMPLETE THE SENTENCES IN PRESENT AND PAST IN PASSIVE

Publishing – past and present

50 years ago

Manuscripts ¹ _____ (write) by hand or on a typewriter.

The finished manuscript ¹ _____ (send) to the publisher by post.

Pictures ¹ _____ (draw) on paper.

Metal plates ² _____ (make) by the printers.

Books ³ _____ (sell) only in bookshops.

Today

Manuscripts ² _____ (type) on a computer.

The finished manuscript ⁴ _____ (email) to the publisher.

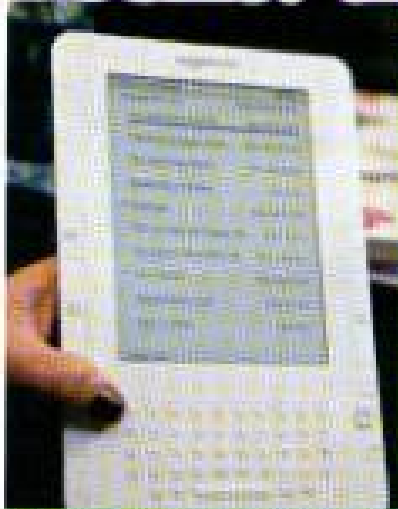
Most pictures ⁵ _____ (create) on a computer.

Some books ³ _____ (print) directly from a computer.

More books ¹¹ _____ (buy) online than from bookshops.

IDENTIFY THE PASSIVES

Books: the final chapter?



Printed books have been bought and sold for hundreds of years and during that time, they haven't changed very much. Until now.

The idea of an electronic book with a screen instead of pages has become reality. Ebook readers have been produced and millions of ebooks have been downloaded from online stores.

At the moment, there are about 725,000 ebooks on Amazon – but thousands more will be added every year in the future. So has the final chapter been written? Will printed books be completely replaced by ebooks? They haven't been replaced yet, but perhaps soon 'real' books won't be sold in shops at all – they'll be kept in museums!

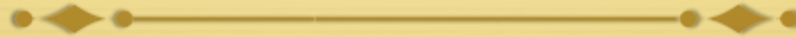
EXERCISES

6 Complete the predictions. Use the future passive form (affirmative or negative) of the verbs in brackets.

Twenty years from now ...

- 1 computers _____ (sell) for \$5.
- 2 housework _____ (do) by robots.
- 3 smells _____ (include) in the films and TV shows you watch at home.
- 4 hotels _____ (build) on the moon.
- 5 all exams _____ (take) online.
- 6 cars _____ (power) by solar energy.
- 7 Chinese _____ (spoken) by everybody in the world.
- 8 wars _____ (fight) to get fresh water.

EXERCISES



- 6** Rewrite the text in the passive. Use the present and past simple. → 10.4

They launched the website Amazon.com in 1995. They chose the name 'Amazon' because it's the biggest river in the world. At first, they only sold books. Soon, they added CDs and DVDs. Today, they offer all kinds of products on their website. People download thousands of ebooks every day from the Kindle store. Last year they sold goods worth \$25 billion!

The website Amazon.com was launched ...

EXERCISES

- 10** Complete the questions. Use the correct passive form (present simple, past simple, present perfect or future) of the verbs in brackets. — 10.4
- 1 How many Harry Potter books _____ (write)?
 - 2 Where _____ polar bears _____ (find): the Arctic or the Antarctic?
 - 3 Where _____ the next Olympic Games _____ (hold)?
 - 4 Which kind of food _____ (sell) at a baker's shop?
 - 5 Can you name one novel that _____ (make) into a film?
 - 6 In which century _____ computers _____ (invent)?
 - 7 What language _____ (speak) by ordinary people in Ancient Rome?
 - 8 _____ Scotland ever _____ (hit) by a tsunami?

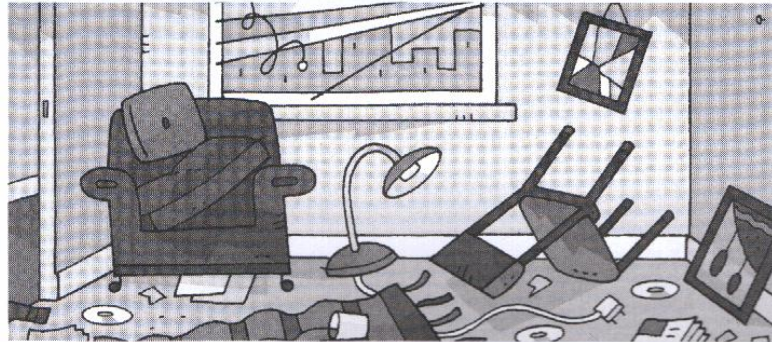
EXERCISES

- 4 Complete the text. Use the present or past simple passive form of the verbs in brackets.

The Rosetta Stone is an ancient Egyptian stone tablet with words on it from 196 BC. The words ¹ are written (write) in three different languages, including Egyptian picture-writing. The stone ² _____ (find) in 1799 by French soldiers who were fighting in Egypt. After the war, it ³ _____ (take) to England. Over the next few years, most of the words on the stone ⁴ _____ (translate), but nobody could understand the picture-writing. That mystery ⁵ _____ (not solve) until 1822, when a French academic called Champollion translated them. The fact that ancient Egyptian picture-writing ⁶ _____ (understand) today is mostly thanks to Champollion's work. Today, the Rosetta Stone ⁷ _____ (keep) in the British Museum, where many ancient Egyptian treasures ⁸ _____ (see) by millions of visitors each year.

EXERCISES

2 Complete the scene from a play. Use the present perfect passive form of the verbs in brackets.



Dr Kraven Oh no! My apartment ¹ has been burgled (burgle).

Eloise How did they get in?

Dr Kraven Through the window. Look. The glass ² _____ (break).

Eloise They've made a terrible mess! ³ _____ anything _____ (steal)?

Dr Kraven Yes. Two notebooks ⁴ _____ (take) from my desk. But look – my credit cards ⁵ _____ (not touch). The thieves knew what they wanted. Those notebooks contain top secret information.

Eloise We must find them!

Dr Kraven It's too late. I'm sure the notebooks ⁶ _____ (read) by now.

Eloise Who committed the robbery?

Dr Kraven Henderson, I expect.

Eloise Kurt Henderson? But he ⁷ _____ (not see) here for years.

Dr Kraven Maybe not. But I know that he ⁸ _____ (release) from prison. My guess is he's back in town.

EXERCISES

Complete the text with the passive form of the verbs in brackets. Use the best tense for each verb: past simple, present simple, present perfect or future.

Secret codes ¹ have been used (use) for thousands of years, from ancient times to the present day. And many books ² _____ (write) about them – for example, Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*, which ³ _____ (publish) in 2003. The book ⁴ _____ (read) by about 80 million people and in 2006, it ⁵ _____ (make) into a film.

The world's first computer programs ⁶ _____ (use) to break German codes during World War II. Today, the best codes ⁷ _____ (make) using extremely large numbers, and even the fastest computers in the world can't break them.

However, most computer scientists believe that in the future, a new kind of computer ⁸ _____ (build): a quantum computer. The strongest codes that we have today ⁹ _____ (break) easily by this computer.

MAKE THE SENTENCES PASSIVE (PRESENT SIMPLE)

Somebody cleans the office every day.

The office is cleaned every day _____

Somebody sends emails.

Somebody cuts the grass.

Somebody prefers chocolate.

Somebody often steals cars.

Somebody plays loud music.

Somebody speaks English here.

Somebody loves the London parks.

Somebody wants staff.

Somebody writes articles.

MAKE THE SENTENCES PASSIVE (PRESENT SIMPLE)



Somebody loves Julie.

Somebody reads a lot of books.

Somebody cooks dinner everyday.

Somebody delivers milk in the mornings.

Somebody buys flowers for the flat.

Somebody washes the cars every week.

Somebody writes a report every Friday.

Somebody fixes the roads.

Somebody builds new houses every year.

Somebody sells vegetables in the market.

MAKE THE SENTENCES PASSIVE (PAST SIMPLE)

Somebody lost the letter.

— The letter was lost —

Somebody found the key.

Somebody made mistakes.

Somebody loved that woman.

Somebody cleaned the rooms.

Somebody fixed the computer.

Somebody built that house.

Somebody wrote 'War and Peace'.

Somebody painted The Mona Lisa.

Somebody stole my wallet.

MAKE THE SENTENCES PASSIVE (PAST SIMPLE)

Somebody prepared lunch.

Somebody drank a lot of coffee.

Somebody forgot the papers.

Somebody closed the windows.

Somebody invited Julie and Luke to a party.

Somebody built a website.

Somebody ate all the cakes.

Somebody told me to wait.

Somebody employed a lot of new waiters.

Somebody opened a shop.

MAKE THE SENTENCES PASSIVE (PRESENT PERFECT)

Somebody has cleaned the kitchen.

___ The kitchen has been cleaned _____

Somebody has watered the plants.

Somebody has taken the money.

Somebody has bought the presents.

Somebody has finished the report.

Somebody has killed the President.

Somebody has repaired the road.

Somebody has elected that man.

Somebody has learned lessons.

Somebody has fired John.

MAKE THE SENTENCES PASSIVE (PRESENT PERFECT)



Somebody has ordered new books.

Somebody has prepared the meal.

Somebody has sent the email.

Somebody has eaten the strawberries.

Somebody has fixed the heating.

Somebody has made coffee.

Somebody has turned on the air conditioning.

Somebody has downloaded the song.

Somebody has rented a flat.

Somebody has booked the holiday.

MAKE THE SENTENCES PASSIVE (FUTURE SIMPLE)

Somebody will clean the windows.

___ The windows will be cleaned _____

Somebody will meet you at the airport.

Somebody will process your application.

Somebody will find your glasses.

Somebody will bring food.

Somebody will help you.

Somebody will steal that bicycle.

Somebody will take your order.

Somebody will write a new book.

Somebody will build a stadium.

MAKE THE SENTENCES PASSIVE (FUTURE SIMPLE)



Somebody will collect your luggage.

Somebody will explain the plan.

Somebody will wash the floor later.

Somebody will deliver a parcel .

Somebody will drink all the juice.

Somebody will prepare everything.

Somebody will write the article next week.

Somebody will eat the chocolate.

Somebody will send the information.

Somebody will call you.

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