

# Passive Voice

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# Active Voice & Passive Voice

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- Active voice is more common in speech and is generally preferable:
  - In active voice, it is clear who is performing the action – it is the subject:
    - My brother **has finished** his homework.
    - My Dad **will cook** dinner tomorrow.
    - I **completed** the report yesterday.

# Passive Voice

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- Passive voice is more common in academic, professional, and technical writing:
  - In passive voice, the focus is on the action, not on who is performing it.
  - It is often not important, already known, or unknown who is performing an action.
    - The report **was completed** yesterday.
    - A mistake **has been made** and **will be corrected**.

# Forming a Verb in Passive Voice

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A form of “be” + Past Participle  
(shows tense) (always the same)

\* regular verb + -ed

\* irregular verb: third form

|         | Simple                | Progressive                    | Perfect                    |
|---------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Present | am / are / is treated | am / are / is<br>being treated | have / has<br>been treated |
| Past    | was / were treated    | was / were<br>being treated    | had been treated           |
| Future  | will be treated       | -----                          | will have been treated     |

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| <b>Future</b>  | will be taken       | -----                        | will have been taken     |

# Recognizing Passive Voice

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- If you see a form of “be” and a Past Participle, passive voice is used in a sentence.
  - The money **was transferred** to his bank account.
- If you see “by” followed by a noun phrase, passive voice is used in the sentence.
  - Several important projects **have been completed** by this team.
- Sometimes a Past Participle is used without “be” (in reduced clauses):
  - The “Godfather,” ~~which was~~ **directed** by Francis Ford Coppola, is my favorite movie.

# Forming a Passive Sentence

|         | Subject  | Verb              | Object              |                |
|---------|--|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Active  | The teacher  | <b>chose</b>      | an interesting book | for the class. |
| Steps:  | 1. Use the object of an active sentence as the subject of a passive sentence.<br>2. Determine the tense used in the active voice verb.<br>3. Use the verb “be” in this tense.<br>4. After “be”, add the Past Participle of the active voice verb.<br>5. Use the subject of an active sentence after “by” or take it out of the passive sentence. |                   |                     |                |
| Passive | An interesting book  | <b>was chosen</b> | (by the teacher)    | for the class. |

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| Passive | An interesting book  | <b>was chosen</b> | (by the teacher)    | for the class. |



# Passive Voice with Modal Verbs

| Modal Verb     | Present  | Past   |
|----------------|--|--|
| can            | + <b>be</b> + Past Participle  | + <b>have been</b> + Past Participle   |
| could          |  |  |
| must           |  |  |
| should         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tom <b><u>should be invited</u></b> to the picnic.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The letter <b><u>should have been mailed</u></b> last week.</li></ul>          |
| may            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The window <b><u>cannot be opened</u></b>.</li></ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• My boss <b><u>could not have been fired</u></b>. I don't believe it!</li></ul> |
| might          |  |  |
| have to/has to |  |  |

# Not All Verbs Can Be Passive

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- Only transitive verbs – verbs that take a direct object – can form passive voice.
- The following verbs are **never** used in the passive voice:
  - appear, arrive, belong, consist, come, die
  - happen, fall, lack, last, occur
  - remain, resemble, rest, seem, stay, wait\*

\* From: "Teaching Academic ESL Writing" by Eli Hinkel.

# Verbs Often Used in Passive Voice

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- The following Past Participles are **often** used in academic texts:
  - applied, approved, associated (with), attributed (to), based (on), called, chosen, classified
  - compared, composed, defined, derived, described, designed, determined, discussed
  - distributed, documented, entitled, estimated, examined, expected, explained, expressed
  - extracted, formed, grouped, held, identified, illustrated, inclined, intended, introduced
  - involved, known, labeled, left, limited (to), linked (to/with), located (at/in), lost
  - measured, needed, noted, observed, obtained, performed, positioned, prepared, presented
  - recognized, regarded, related (to), reported, represented, required, situated, viewed\*

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