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you yawn. So, where do we start on this journey? Hang tight, because by the end of this, you'll be wielding the passive voice like a pro. The passive voice is a way of writing or speaking where the object of an action becomes the subject of the sentence. For example, instead of saying "The cat chased the mouse," in passive voice, you would say "The mouse was chased by the cat." This style often makes sentences longer and can make it unclear who is performing the action. However, it's useful in formal writing or when the doer of the action is unknown or unimportant. To form a passive sentence, you need the correct form of the verb "to be" and the past participle of the main verb. Remember, using the passive voice can make your writing harder to understand if overused. It's best to use it carefully and mix it with active voice sentences for clearer communication. Understanding the Passive Voice in English Grammar The passive voice is when the subject of a sentence is the recipient of the action, as opposed to performing the action itself, which is known as the active voice. Often perceived as formal or complex, the passive voice serves specific functions in English Grammar that prioritize the action or the object of the sentence over the actor. To form a passive sentence, the verb "to be" is combined with the past participle of the main verb. The following table demonstrates this formation by contrasting active and passive sentences across different verb tenses: Active Voice Passive Voice I write a letter. A letter is written by me. John painted the wall. The wall was painted by John. They will renovate the house. The house will be renovated by them. Mary is baking a cake. A cake is being baked by Mary. As seen in the table, the subject and object positions are reversed in passive sentences when compared to their active counterparts. The passive sentence includes the verb "to be" and the past participle of the main verb, such as "is written" or "was painted". Furthermore, the passive voice emphasizes the action, whereas the active voice emphasizes the subject performing the action. "In passive sentences, the focus is on the receiver of the action, not the performer of the action. This allows for flexibility in our communication and lends itself to various writing styles and purposes." Passive voice can be found in a variety of writing genres, including academic papers, news reports, and official documents. Its usage differs from the active voice, as it shifts the emphasis from the doer of an action to the action being performed or the object being acted upon. In the next section of this article, we will discuss when and why to use the passive voice for effective communication. Related: "I Graduated" or "I Have Graduated" - Which is Correct?Take note of the following key points when considering the use of passive voice in your writing: The passive voice presents the subject of a sentence as the recipient of the action. It is formed by combining the verb "to be" with the past participle of the main verb. Passive sentences may prioritize the action or the object of the sentence over the actor. The choice between active and passive voice depends on the desired emphasis and communication style. Now that you have a better understanding of the passive voice in English grammar, continue reading to explore its various applications and functions in different writing contexts. When and Why to Use the Passive Voice Considering the significance of passive voice in English sentence construction, it becomes crucial to understand when and why this particular voice should be applied. The following scenarios demonstrate the utility and effectiveness of employing the passive voice in context: The Subject is Unknown or Unimportant The passive voice is most suitable when the subject performing the action is unknown or irrelevant. In such cases, emphasis is placed on the action itself or the recipient. This is common in situations where the perpetrator is unidentified, such as the theft of a bag or a break-in at a house. Emphasizing the Action over the Actor When the outcome of the action is more significant than who performed it, the passive voice serves to highlight the action. This can be seen in contexts like delay announcements or the reporting of events caused by natural disasters, where the result of such events is the focus, rather than the actor responsible for the action. When the Subject is Obvious or Known to All If the actor is apparent and requires no explicit mention, the passive voice can be appropriately used. Examples include routine actions carried out by recognized figures or entities, such as arrests made by police or services performed by specific personnel. In these cases, the passive sentence emphasizes the action without redundant identification of the subject. Conveying a General Truth or Widely Accepted Idea Passive voice effectively communicates general truths or widely accepted ideas, where the actor is the general public or the consensus, thereby eliminating the need to specify the subject. This usage underlines the action or idea itself, focusing on the main message without redundantly mentioning the commonly understood subject. Forming the Passive Voice: A Step-by-Step Explanation The process of forming passive voice in English sentences is inherently linked to the verb "to be" and the past participle of the main verb. Understanding how to combine these elements is crucial for mastering passive voice sentence constructions. Let's take a comprehensive look at the key steps involved in forming passive voice sentences. Identify the main verb: Determine the action verb in your sentence. Conjugate the verb "to be". Choose the appropriate form of the verb "to be" depending on the tense required. Form the past participle: Create the past participle of the main verb. Reorder the sentence components: Organize the sentence with the subject receiving the action, followed by the conjugated "to be" and the past participle. Related: Is It Correct to Say "I Am Very Much Looking Forward"?Now, it's essential to explore how verb tense affects the formation of passive voice sentences. As the required tense changes, so does the form of the verb "to be" and, consequently, the passive sentence construction. Tense Example in Active Voice Example in Passive Voice Present Simple They clean the office every day. The office is cleaned every day. Past Simple She finished the report last night. The report was finished last night. Future Simple They will build a new bridge next year. A new bridge will be built next year. Present Perfect They have submitted his application. His application has been submitted. Aside from the standard verb tenses, passive voice constructions can also accommodate structures using infinitives and gerunds. Examples: To be given (infinitive) Being told (gerund) With these English grammar rules and the step-by-step explanation provided, you can now form passive voice sentences in various situations confidently. Practice is essential to develop fluency, so don't hesitate to play with different verb tenses and sentence structures to hone your skills. The Impact of Verb Tenses on the Passive Voice The tense of the verb "to be" plays a crucial role in forming the passive voice, as it must align with the temporal context of the action. From the simple present to past perfect tenses, each verb tense modifies the structure of the passive sentence, reflecting the time-frame in which the action occurred, is occurring, or will occur. Understanding how verb tenses influence the structure and meaning of passive voice sentences helps to improve clarity and precision in your writing. Here's a breakdown of how verb conjugation impacts passive voice sentences across different English tenses: English Tense Active Voice Example Passive Voice Example Present They make the decision. The decision is made by them. Present Continuous They are making the decision. The decision is being made by them. Past Simple They made the decision. The decision was made by them. Past Continuous They were making the decision. The decision was being made by them. Future Simple They will make the decision. The decision will be made by them. Future Continuous They will be making the decision. (not commonly used in passive voice) Present Perfect They have made the decision. The decision has been made by them. Past Perfect They had made the decision. The decision had been made by them. Future Perfect They will have made the decision. The decision will have been made by them. As demonstrated in the table above, the verb tense greatly affects the construction of passive voice sentences. By mastering the use of appropriate verb conjugations, you can ensure your writing is not only grammatically accurate but also effectively conveys the intended information. Passive Voice in Action: Real-World Examples In this section, we will dive into the real-life application of passive voice constructions, shedding light on their widespread usage in academic writing, scientific reports, and news reporting. Engaging with these practical examples will allow you to grasp the importance of passive voice in professional writing more effectively. Related: "At School" Or "In School" - Easy Preposition GuidePassive Voice in Academic and Scientific Writing Academic and scientific writing adheres to a formal style that often favors the use of passive constructions. The passive voice is preferred because it establishes objectivity and emphasizes the process, results, or evidence, rather than the individual researchers. This allows the reader to focus solely on the informational content and methodology of a study or experiment. Below are some passive voice examples commonly encountered in academic and scientific writing: The samples were analyzed using a mass spectrometer. The temperature was maintained at 37°C throughout the experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Utilization of Passive Voice in News Reporting News reporting frequently employs passive voice constructions to prioritize the delivery of information. Reports often need to detail events or incidents where the full facts are not yet available, or the agent is intentionally omitted. By using passive constructions, the pertinent details can be conveyed effectively without engaging in unnecessary speculation about who carried out the action. The following examples demonstrate how the passive voice is utilized in news reporting: Major road closures were announced due to heavy snowfall in the area. A rare painting was stolen from a prestigious art gallery last night. Several homes were evacuated after a gas leak was detected in the neighborhood. Passive voice in professional writing lends an air of objectivity, stylistic formality, and informational emphasis, making it an essential aspect of practical grammar. Understanding and mastering the use of passive voice constructions is a crucial element of professional writing and practical grammar. Whether it's for academic papers, scientific reports, or news articles, the passive voice allows writers to focus on the information and outcomes, while maintaining a formal and objective tone. Through the examples provided in this section, you can better comprehend the real-world application of passive voice in various contexts. Exercises to Master the Passive Voice in Your Writing Improving your grasp on passive voice requires consistent practice and a variety of exercises to fine-tune your grammar skills. In this section, we'll focus on effective activities that will help you understand when and how to use the passive voice in your writing. By regularly engaging in these exercises, you can reinforce your knowledge and adapt it to various writing contexts. To begin, experiment with converting active sentences to passive ones and vice versa. This will help you identify the differences between the two constructions and understand the situations in which they are most appropriate. Additionally, pay special attention to verb tenses, as this will aid in the accurate formation of passive sentences based on the action's time-frame. Next, put your passive voice skills to the test by engaging in exercises that mimic real-world scenarios. This can involve academic writing, news reporting, or other contexts where the passive voice plays a crucial role. Lastly, take advantage of resources like quizzes and online tools that provide further practice and support your ongoing development of passive voice mastery in different writing styles. By actively participating in these grammar exercises and applying the passive voice knowledge acquired in this guide, you'll effectively improve your writing skills and better understand how to deliver clear, concise, and impactful messages in various contexts. Unlock the Secrets of English! Subscribe now and transform your language skills with insider tips, tricks, and exclusive content! You May Also Like: Printable PDF Version Fair-Use Policy In English, all sentences are in either "active" or "passive" voice: active: Werner Heisenberg formulated the uncertainty principle in 1927. passive: The uncertainty principle was formulated by Werner Heisenberg in 1927. In an active sentence, the person or thing responsible for the action in the sentence comes first. In a passive sentence, the person or thing acted at comes first, and the actor is added at the end, introduced with the preposition "by." The passive form of the verb is signaled by a form of "to be": in the sentence above, "was formulated" is in passive voice while "formulated" is in active. In a passive sentence, we often omit the actor completely: The uncertainty principle was formulated in 1927. When do I use passive voice? In some sentences, passive voice can be perfectly acceptable. You might use it in the following cases: The actor is unknown: The cave paintings of Lascaux were made in the Upper Old Stone Age. [We don't know who made them.] The actor is irrelevant: An experimental solar power plant will be built in the Australian desert. [We are not interested in who is building it.] You want to be vague about who is responsible: Mistakes were made. [Common in bureaucratic writing!] You are talking about a general truth: Rules are made to be broken. [By whomever, whenever.] You want to emphasize the person or thing acted on. For example, it may be your main topic: Insulin was first discovered in 1921 by researchers at the University of Toronto. It is still the only treatment available for diabetes. You are writing in a scientific genre that traditionally relies on passive voice. Passive voice is often preferred in lab reports and scientific research papers, most notably in the Materials and Methods section: The sodium hydroxide was dissolved in water. This solution was then titrated with hydrochloric acid. In these sentences you can count on your reader to know that you are the one who did the dissolving and the titrating. The passive voice places the emphasis on your experiment rather than on you. Note: Over the past several years, there has been a movement within many science disciplines away from passive voice. Scientists often now prefer active voice in most parts of their published reports, even occasionally using the subject "we" in the Materials and Methods section. Check with your instructor or TA whether you can use the first person "I" or "we" in your lab reports to help avoid the passive. To learn more about the use of passive voice in the sciences, visit our handout on writing in the sciences. When should I avoid passive voice? Passive sentences can get you into trouble in academic writing because they can be vague about who is responsible for the action: Both Othello and Iago desire Desdemona. She is courted. [Who courts Desdemona? Othello? Iago? Both of them?] Academic writing often focuses on differences between the ideas of different researchers, or between your own ideas and those of the researchers you are discussing. Too many passive sentences can create confusion: Research has been done to discredit this theory. [Who did the research? You? Your professor? Another author?] Some students use passive sentences to hide holes in their research: The telephone was invented in the nineteenth century. [I couldn't find out who invented the telephone!] Finally, passive sentences often sound wordy and indirect. They can make the reader work unnecessarily hard. And since they are usually longer than active sentences, passive sentences take up precious room in your paper: Since the car was being driven by Michael at the time of the accident, the damages should be paid for by him. Weeding out passive sentences If you now use a lot of passive sentences, you may not be able to catch all of the problematic cases in your first draft. But you can still go back through your essay hunting specifically for passive sentences. At first, you may want to ask for help from a writing instructor. The grammar checker in your word processor can help spot passive sentences, though grammar checkers should always be used with extreme caution since they can easily mislead you. To spot passive sentences, look for a form of the verb to be in your sentence, with the actor either missing or introduced after the verb using the word "by". Poland was invaded in 1939, thus initiating the Second World War. Genetic information is encoded by DNA. The possibility of cold fusion has been examined for many years. Try turning each passive sentence you find into an active one. Start your new sentence with the actor. Sometimes you may find that need to do some extra research or thinking to figure out who the actor should be! You will likely find that your new sentence is stronger, shorter, and more precise: Germany invaded Poland in 1939, thus initiating the Second World War. DNA encodes genetic information. Physicists have examined the possibility of cold fusion for many years. What is passive voice? And what is active voice? Does the use of passive verbs make passive voice? Does it have an effect on the writing tone? Learn everything about passive voice (and the differences with active voice) in this worksheet... When constructing a statement using passive voice, the object of the phrase comes first, and the sentence's subject comes last. Although passive voice is not a grammatical error, it makes your writing less straightforward and understandable. When we wish to put more emphasis on the action (the verb) and the object of a statement rather than the subject of the phrase, we employ passive voice. This indicates that the topic is either not as significant as the action itself or that we do not know who or what the subject is. Either of these possibilities is possible. Passive voice example phrase 1. Susanne was driven to the airport in a vehicle. In this instance, Susanne did not carry out the action corresponding to the verb "to drive." She was the recipient of the action. She was the one who benefited from the activity. 2. The black kite is a species that is now protected. The process is being carried out in relation to the topic of "black kite." 3. In this chamber, the grapes are crushed, and the juice is extracted from them. The action, which is being carried out, is being done to "the grapes." Passive voice example phrase To determine if a sentence has an active or passive voice, consider both what occurred and who was accountable for carrying it out. If the person or object responsible for doing the acts is either removed from the phrase entirely or comes in the sentence after the event. If you find a past participle directly after the form of "to be," the statement is written in passive voice. 1. Invasion was carried out in Afghanistan. Passive voice is used when the agent of the action is not present. 2. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. That is known as passive voice. The action is described in the second sentence, followed by the person who carried it out. 3. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. This is an example of active voice. The one who takes action comes first. Passive voice example phrase When there is uncertainty regarding who was responsible for anything that had a place, the passive voice is often chosen: An unidentified person stole the car.The factory was set ablaze early in the wee hours of the morning.The terrifying tales were passed around the school camp. As seen from the first two instances, passive voice is appropriate when discussing unsolved cases. TenseActive voicePassive voicePresent simpleThe teacher punishes me.I am punished by the teacher.Present continuousThe teacher is punishing me.I am being punished by the teacher.Past simpleThe teacher punished me.I was punished by the teacher.Past continuousThe teacher was punishing me.I was being punished by the teacher.Present perfectThe teacher has punished me.I have been punished by the teacher. It is also acceptable to use passive voice when the person who is doing the activity is unimportant: Example: The Museum was shown to the public for the first time in 1942. In this particular instance, we are not concerned with the identity of the person who unveiled the monument. Instead, we are interested in the date the statue was revealed to the public. That justifies the use of passive voice. Passive voice example phrase When writing in a more professional or academic style, the use of the passive voice is often discouraged. Using passive voice in more casual and informal communication is more acceptable. Using passive voice might result in lengthy phrases that are difficult to understand. It can also lead to sentences that just sound weird. If using passive voice makes a statement too ambiguous, avoid using it. Because it enables a speaker to make assertions or comments without expressly specifying a source of information; passive voice is often frowned upon in the academic world. You can create sentences in the passive voice by following this structure: Subject in the passive voice + to be + past participle It is important to note that the participle form of the primary verb comes after conjugating the word "be." The farm was established in 1972.My colleague is being interviewed today.The construction of the dam has been finished recently. In most cases, passive voice does not use the perfect continuous or other perfect tenses. The structure of passive voice in the present simple is: am / is / are + past participle (3rd form of the verb). A senior student assisted the newcomer to the class. When forming passive voice in the present progressive tense, use this structure: The present tense form of the verb to be (am, is, are) +being + the past participle form of the verb (eaten, done, began, etc.). The TV is being played continuously by the child. Passive voice in the past simple tense is created like this: Object + was/were + Past Participle form of the verb + subject The Kite Runner was written by Kahlil Gibran. Passive voice in the past progressive tense is created like this: Object + was/were + being + past participle + by + subject Harry Potter was being defeated by Draco Malfoy in a duel. Passive voice in the future tense is created like this: Object + will/shall + be + past participle form of verb The project will be finished by Susanne tomorrow. Passive voice in the present perfect tense is created like this: Object + has/have + been + past participle form of the verb + by + subject James has been confronted by the principle. Passive voice in the future perfect tense is created like this: Object + will/shall + have been + past participle form of verb + Subject Timothy will have been going to Germany. Here is how you can make passive voice using modals (can/could): Object + can/could + be + past participle form of verb + by + Subject The book could have been torn by Susanne. Here is how you can make passive voice using modals (must): Object + must + be + past participle form of verb + by + Subject The book must be returned by John to the librarian. Most of the time, dynamic verbs, also known as "action verbs," are used to describe either acts that we can take or events that take place. Stative verbs often relate to a situation or circumstance that is stable or unlikely to undergo any changes in the near future. This distinction is significant because stative verbs typically cannot get employed in the continuous forms (BE + ING) derived from BE. 1. Sam was going to the departmental store. The sun was at its prime, and it made him sweat. His sister had told him to buy noodles because her friend had told her to bring noodles to the sleepover. In this example, Sam is reactive. His sisters tell him to bring noodles. Her friend wants her to make noodles for the sleepover. The sun was sweltering and it made him sweat. Samantha planned the trick.The wedding cake was bought by Simone.The school team was given multiple awards by the coaches.A fun party was enjoyed by all. Passive voice infographic Most of the time, changing a sentence written in the passive voice into one written in the active voice is the most effective way to improve the overall writing quality. The active and passive forms of the phrase need to convey the meaning to the reader. In most cases, the subject of a statement written in passive voice is recast as the sentence's direct object. The person doing the action is the subject of the new sentence in the (now) active voice. Let's look at some problematic statements and correct them to see how this works. In the passive: The show was watched by my brother. In the active: My brother watched the show. "The show" was shown as the subject in the passive sentence. When changed to an active sentence, it now becomes the direct object. 1. Passive: The tourist accidentally fell into a hole that was inhabited by both non-poisonous spiders and dangerous tarantulas. He sustained many bite wounds. Active: The traveler was unfortunate enough to fall into a hole that both harmless spiders and dangerous tarantulas inhabited. To his good fortune, only the spiders repeatedly bit him. 2. Passive: It has been established that dogs make better companion animals than cats. Active: The Society for the Preservation of Dogs and Cats concluded that cats make poorer pets than dogs. What is passive voice construction? The most common construction is a variant of the auxiliary verb 'to be' followed by the past participle of a transitive verb. What's the difference between active and passive voice? Here's the formula for active voice: [subject]+[verb (performed by the subject)]+[optional object] Passive voice usually refers to the object in a passive manner. How do I turn a passive voice sentence into an active one? You can change words like "be" to "get." Or "may" to "can." Active sentences sound more definitive. It's best to avoid passive sentences in formal writing (scientific writing, essays, etc.). Use the passive voice for informal writing, like letters or emails. More on sentence structure: