

# The passive

## A Starting activities

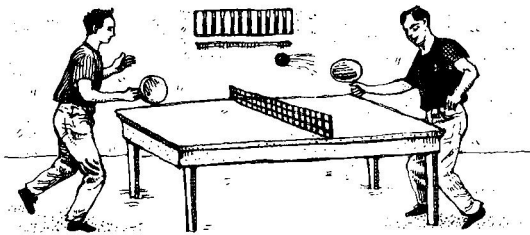
### 1 Life in prison

Present simple passive

Work in pairs. Describe the lives of prisoners in a prison. Use present simple passive sentences and use the list of verbs and the pictures below to give you ideas.

Example: *They are woken by an alarm at 6.30 a.m.*

**Verbs:** *wake, allow, take, teach, count, lead, watch, bring, give*



1 allow . . . play games



2 take . . . see visitors



3 teach . . . repair cars

### 2 MacBurger's delicious burgers

Present progressive passive

Work in pairs. Take it in turns to be a waiter at MacBurger's restaurant. Your partner is the cook. Customers keep complaining that the food is taking a long time to arrive. The cook uses present progressive passive sentences to say what is happening to the food. Use the foods and verbs below to help you. Example:

WAITER *Where's the ice-cream?*

COOK *It's (just) being prepared.*

**Food:** chips, burgers, coffee, tea, coke, eggs, beans, apple pie, ice-cream, milkshakes

**Verbs:** *prepare, fry, boil, grill, make, pour, put (on the tray), take out (of the oven), finish, cook, serve, freeze, cut, heat up*

### 3 Active or passive?

When to use the active and the passive

Work as a class. Which in the pairs of sentences below is more natural, the active or the passive?

- A: What do the Marconi family eat?  
 B: They eat a lot of Italian food. (ACTIVE)  
 B: A lot of Italian food is eaten by them. (PASSIVE)
- On a notice  
 ACTIVE We will prosecute trespassers.  
 PASSIVE Trespassers will be prosecuted.
- A: Where's your car?  
 B: The garage is servicing it. (ACTIVE)  
 B: It's being serviced. (PASSIVE)

When you have finished, look at Activity note 60 on page 155.

# B Grammar guide

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- 1 The form of the passive**
- The passive is formed by *be* and the past participle.
    - Simple present *is/are* + past participle: *Smoking is not allowed.*
    - Present progressive *is/are being* + past participle: *Dinner is being served.*
    - Simple past *was/were* + past participle: *He was killed.*
    - Past progressive *was/were being* + past participle: *It was being repaired.*
    - Present perfect *has/have been* + past participle: *They've been hurt.*
    - Past perfect *had been* + past participle: *It had already been done.*
    - Future
      - will be* + past participle: *It will be built soon.*
      - is going to be* + past participle: *It is going to be built soon.*
  - We can use *by* or *with* in passive sentences before an agent (someone who does the action), an instrument (what the action is done with) and a material (what something is made of).
    - Agent *'Hamlet' was written **by** Shakespeare.*
    - Instrument *He was killed **with** a knife.*  
*The building was hit **by** lightning.*
    - Material *The best coffee is made **with** good coffee beans.*
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- 2 The use of the passive**
- Use the passive when it is not important who or what did the action, or when we don't know who or what did the action.  
*This church was built in 1688.* (The agent is not important.)  
*My car has been stolen.* (The agent is unknown.)
- The passive is used in:
- Formal notices: *Passengers are requested not to smoke until the aircraft stops.*
  - Newspapers: *A man is being questioned about the robbery.*
  - Processes in science or engineering: *The engine is cooled by air, not water.*
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- 3 Verbs with the passive**
- Many active verbs have no passive because the agent is usually known and important. For example: *escape, fit, get, have, let, like, suit, survive.*  
*These shoes don't suit me.* (no passive is possible)  
*He escaped from prison.* (no passive is possible)  
*They got married last week.* (no passive is possible)
- On the other hand, these verbs are passive, not active:  
*I was born in Oxford.* (always passive and always past tense)  
*He's said to be a great writer.* (= people say he is)
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- 4 Sentence structures with the passive**
- After modals (including *will*) use *be* + past participle.  
*This problem can be solved.*
  - To talk about the past, with a modal, use *have been* + past participle.  
*The baby should have been fed hours ago.*
  - We can use the passive + infinitive + object with these verbs: *advise, believe, expect, feel, forbid, mean, order, report, request, require, say, teach, understand.*  
*I was taught to use the passive at school.*
  - We often use *it* as the subject of these verbs in the passive: *agree, announce, discover, expect, hope, suggest.*  
*It was agreed that we would arrive at six.*

# C Activities

## 1 The kidnapping of Horace Boot

Passive with past tenses

- 1 Work in pairs or groups. Millionaire Horace Boot, aged 68, was kidnapped and a ransom was demanded from his nephew Clyde. Write between ten and fifteen passive sentences about what happened from when Horace Boot was kidnapped, to when the kidnappers were caught by the police. Use the main events below to help you.

### Main events

- The kidnapping (How was he kidnapped? Where was he taken? What was he given to eat and drink? What was he allowed to do?)
  - The paying of the ransom (What was Clyde told to do? How much was he asked to pay?)
  - The police hunt (The police were told. By whom? A member of the kidnap gang was seen. By whom? Where was the money left? Where was Horace released? How were the gang arrested?)
- 2 Work as a class. You are making a film of the Horace Boot kidnap story. Take the best suggestions from everybody in the class for the main events and plan the film. (Which stars do you want in it?) Use passive sentences only where it is natural to do so.

## 2 Moving

Past simple and present perfect passive and modals (*may/might/could*)

- 1 Work in pairs or small groups. You are moving to a new flat. Quickly list at least twenty items that will be moved on the removal van. Make sure that you include furniture, personal possessions, children's toys, clothes.

- 2 When you get to the new flat everything has been lost or damaged in some way. Take it in turns to ask each other about everything on the list. Answer with a past or present perfect passive sentence if you are sure what has happened to the item. Answer with a present perfect passive with modal *may/might/could* if you are not sure. There are verbs below to give you ideas. Examples:

A: *Where's the . . . ? / What's happened to the . . . ?*

B: *It was dropped down the stairs. / It's been left behind. / It may have been left behind.*

**Verbs:** *drop, smash, break, tear, lose, leave behind, damage, forget, take* (to the wrong flat, for example), *run over, squash*

## 3 Mad machines

Passive, all tenses

- 1 Work in pairs or small groups. Design and draw a 'mad machine'; for example, a machine for making sunshine, a machine for making money out of banana skins, a machine for making people happy or a machine for punishing people you do not like.
- 2 Explain how your machine works to another pair or group or to the whole class. Use the ideas below to help you but use the passive only where it seems natural to do so.

### Ideas

The engine is started from here.

While the people are being strapped in . . .

When all the juice has been squeezed out . . .

When this button is pressed . . .

A weight is released.

When this lever is pulled . . .

Coins are put in the slot here, and then . . .

# D Accuracy practice

## 1 Make these sentences passive ONLY where possible.

- 1 Those shoes really suit you.
- 2 We export eighty per cent of what we produce.
- 3 Sharon and Jim survived a night on the mountain in winter.
- 4 We expect trainee pilots to land an aircraft after twenty hours of instruction.
- 5 We will send you the papers immediately.
- 6 Three prisoners escaped from the prison during the night.
- 7 One moment, please. The waiter is just adding up your bill.
- 8 Mick's got a new motorbike.
- 9 By the time I arrived, someone had already opened all your letters.

## 2 Make all these sentences passive. Don't use phrases with *by* or *with*.

- 1 The firm promised us our money back.  
We \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 The travel agent told them that the hotel was near the sea.  
They \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 The other children were always calling Harriet stupid.  
Harriet \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 The box office had sold the last tickets just before we got there.  
The last tickets \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Passport control should have stopped her.  
She \_\_\_\_\_

## 3 Write out these passive sentences in full.

- 1 If you/required/for an interview, you/notified/by letter tomorrow.
- 2 He was an old man. His trousers/held up/with a safety pin/which/pinned/to his shirt.
- 3 Parcels cannot/sent/through the post tied up with string.
- 4 The car/hit/by falling rocks as we drove along the valley.
- 5 The roof of this church/has just/repared/with local wood.

## 4 Put the verb in brackets into the correct passive tense in this report.

Three men <sup>1</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (want) by the police in connection with a robbery at a petrol station. The cashier <sup>2</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (hold up) and <sup>3</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (threaten) with a knife. While the money <sup>4</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (steal) the cashier <sup>5</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (tie up) by one of the men. Some car parts <sup>6</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (also/steal), but the cashier's wallet <sup>7</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (not/take). The men escaped in a blue Volvo car which police believe <sup>8</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (use) in other robberies.

## 5 Put the verbs in brackets into the correct passive tense to complete this description of the production of baked beans.

The tomato purée <sup>1</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (send) here from Italy and Greece in the form of a concentrate. It <sup>2</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (dilute) with ordinary water and then sugar, spices, and starch <sup>3</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (add). When they <sup>4</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (add), it <sup>5</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (mix) together and <sup>6</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (heat). The sauce must <sup>7</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (heat) before it reaches the production line so that the beans can <sup>8</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (add) to it.