



## PASSIVE VOICE

Study this example

This house **was built** in 1930. “**Was built**” is passive.  
Compare active and passive.

Somebody **built** this house in 1930. (Active)  
Subject                      object

This house **was built** in 1930. (Passive)

We use an active verb to say what the subject does.

- ❖ My grandfather was a builder. He built this house in 1930.
- ❖ It is a big company. It employs 200.000 people.

We use a passive verb to say what happens to the subject.

- ❖ This house is quite old **It was built** in 1930.
- ❖ **200.000 people are employed** by the company.

When we use the passive, who or what causes the action is often unknown or unimportant. If we want to say who does or what causes the action, we use **by**: This house was built **by my grandfather**.

The passive is **be + past participle**.

Some verbs can have two objects.

- We gave the police the information. (=We gave the information to the police). So it is possible to make two passive sentences:
- **The police** were given the information, or **The information** was given **to** the police.

Other verbs which can have two objects are: ask, offer, pay, show, teach, etc...

I don't like being.../I hate people keeping me waiting.

The passive of **doing/ seeing etc.** is **being done/ being seen** etc. Compare: I don't like people telling me what to do. (act.)

I don't like **being told** what to do. (Passive)

Sometimes we can use **get** instead of **be** in the passive.

- There was a fight at the party but nobody **got hurt** = **was hurt**.

You can use get to say that something happens to somebody or something, especially if this is unplanned or unexpected:

- Our dog **got run** over by a car.

You can use get only when things happen or change. We also use get in the following expressions (which are not passive in meaning):

**Get married /get divorced/ Get dressed / get changed**

tense	active	passive
Simple present	She types letters	Letters are typed
Present continuous	She is typing letters	Letters are being typed
Simple past	She typed letters	Letters were typed
Past continuous	She was typing letters	Letters were being typed
Present perfect	She has typed letters	Letters have been typed
Past perfect	She had typed letters	Letters had been typed
Future simple	She will type letters	Letters will be typed
Future perfect simple	She will have typed letters	Letters will have been typed
Be going to	She is going to type letters	Letters are going to be typed
Modals/ semi-modals	She has to/ can type letters	Letters have to/ can be typed

### Note:

1. The following tenses do not have the passive form: present perfect continuous, past perfect continuous, future continuous and future perfect continuous.
2. The agent (the doer) is not mentioned when it is obvious, unimportant or unknown.  
Spanish **is spoken** in South America, too. His brother **was killed** in an earthquake.
3. You use “**with**” to talk about something that is used to perform the action.  
He was killed **with a knife**.
4. Informally, “get “ is sometimes used instead of “be” to form the passive.