Graphic Grammar: The Passive Voice
Fullerton College Writing Center

Watch the video. Then complete these exercises and check your answers.

Part 1: Active or Passive?
In an active sentence, the **subject** of the sentence is doing the action of the verb. In a passive sentence, someone else is doing the action of the verb to the **subject**.

A. Circle the subject in each sentence below. Then draw an arrow showing the direction of the action. Is the sentence active or passive?

**EXAMPLES:**

- The students turned in their essays late. (Active)
- The essays haven't been graded yet. (Passive)

1. Jack was feeding his dog. (Active)
2. Betty was given a birthday surprise. (Passive)
3. Junk food should not be eaten by anyone. (Active)
4. Bill should not lie on the couch all day. (Active)
5. Baby Bob just drank two bottles of milk. (Active)
6. Baby Bob must be burped right away! (Active)
7. Engineers are trying to fix the bridge. (Active)
8. The bridge was damaged by the earthquake. (Active)

B. To check your answers above, underline the verbs. If there is a form of BE and a past participle, then it is a passive sentence. Write “BE” and “pp” under the verb.

Part 2: Forms of BE

Complete the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple present</th>
<th>This car is <strong>stolen</strong>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present continuous</td>
<td>This car is being <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present perfect</td>
<td>This car has been <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (might)</td>
<td>This car might be <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (could)</td>
<td>This car could be <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future (will)</td>
<td>This car will be <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple past</td>
<td>This car was <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past continuous</td>
<td>This car was being <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past perfect</td>
<td>This car had been <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past (might)</td>
<td>This car must have been <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past (could)</td>
<td>This car could have been <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future (going to)</td>
<td>This car is going to be <strong>stolen</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3: Changing a Sentence from Active to Passive

We often use passive sentences when the subject is unknown, obvious, or unimportant. We also use passive to sound more polite or formal or to avoid blaming someone.

To change a sentence from active to passive, first find the object. The object becomes the subject. It could be the direct or indirect object, but if there is NO object, then the sentence cannot be changed to passive.

A. Circle the object in the sentences below. Then rewrite the sentence in passive form if possible.

**EXAMPLE:** People in Canada speak English and French.

English and French **are spoken by people in Canada.**

1. Somebody knocked over the trash can again.
   - The trash can **was knocked over again** (by somebody).

2. A blind person took these photos.
   - These photos **were taken by a blind person**.

3. A translator translated this book from Russian to English in 1895.
   - This book **was translated from Russian to English in 1895** (by a translator).

4. Nobody has cleaned the bathroom for a week.
   - The bathroom **has not been cleaned** (by anybody) **for a week**.

5. An accident happened on the freeway last night.
   - **X** No passive form

6. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone.
   - The telephone **was invented by Alexander Graham Bell**.

7. We do not allow smoking on this campus.
   - Smoking **is not allowed** (by us) **on this campus**.

8. They will collect the trash one day late this week.
   - **The trash will be collected one day late this week** (by everyone).

B. In the sentences that you wrote above, cross out the "by" phrases that are unknown, obvious, or not important.