

Who Did It? The Detective's Guide to Voice

Active and Passive Voice: same crime, different spotlight

Every sentence with an action is a little crime scene: someone *does* something to someone.

Voice tells us *where the spotlight falls*: on the doer or on the one who receives the action.

ACTIVE (doer first)

The tiger

DOER (agent)

chased

ACTION

the deer.

RECEIVER

PASSIVE

(receiver first)

The deer

was chased

by the tiger.

Active voice: the subject *does* the action. → The tiger chased the deer.

Passive voice: the subject *receives* the action. → The deer was chased by the tiger.

Formula: Object + form of BE + V3 (+ by + doer)

1 Four steps to change Active → Passive

Step	What to do	Example: Ravi writes a letter.
1	Find the <i>object</i> and move it to the front	A letter ...
2	Choose the form of "be" in the <u>same tense</u> as the active verb	A letter is ...
3	Add the <i>past participle (V3)</i> of the main verb	A letter is written ...
4	Add <i>by + doer</i> (only if it matters), changing pronouns	A letter is written by Ravi.

Pronoun swap when the doer moves: I → me, we → us, he → him, she → her, they → them.

She helped me. → I was helped by her.

Fun fact In 1946, George Orwell advised writers: "Never use the passive where you can use the active." Yet scientists use the passive all the time: "The solution was heated to 80 °C." Who heated it doesn't matter, only what happened!

2 The "BE" chart: your passive master key

Tense	Active	Passive (be + V3)
Present simple	She cleans the room.	The room is cleaned by her.
Present continuous	She is cleaning the room.	The room is being cleaned by her.
Present perfect	She has cleaned the room.	The room has been cleaned by her.
Past simple	She cleaned the room.	The room was cleaned by her.
Past continuous	She was cleaning the room.	The room was being cleaned by her.
Past perfect	She had cleaned the room.	The room had been cleaned by her.
Future simple	She will clean the room.	The room will be cleaned by her.
Modals	She must/can/should clean the room.	The room must/can/should be cleaned.

No passive for perfect continuous tenses or future continuous in normal use: they sound clumsy. And **intransitive verbs** (no object) can't be passive at all: The baby sleeps. Who would we put first?

3 When does the passive WIN?

Doer unknown

My bicycle was stolen.
(who stole it? nobody knows)

Doer obvious or unimportant

The thief was arrested.
(by the police, obviously!)

Focus on the result

The Taj Mahal was built in the 17th century.

Spot it in newspapers! Headlines drop "be" to save space: "New bridge inaugurated" = A new bridge was inaugurated. "Schools closed due to heavy rain" = Schools have been closed...

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Tricky Cases

exam favourites

Type	Active	Passive
Imperative (order)	Shut the door.	Let the door be shut.
Imperative (request)	Please help me.	You are requested to help me.
Yes/No question	Did she sing a song?	Was a song sung by her?
Wh- question	Who broke the vase?	By whom was the vase broken?
Wh- question	Why did he scold you?	Why were you scolded by him?
Two objects	The teacher gave us a test.	We were given a test. / A test was given to us.
Doer is "people / someone"	People speak English all over the world.	English is spoken all over the world. (drop "by people")
Phrasal verbs	They looked after the puppy.	The puppy was looked after. (keep "after"!)

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Detective Mistake Files

- ✗ ~~The work was did by him.~~ → The work was done by him. (always V3)
- ✗ ~~The letters is posted.~~ → The letters are posted. ("be" agrees with the new subject)
- ✗ ~~The match was won by we.~~ → The match was won by us. (object pronoun after "by")

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Case Files to Solve

- The chef is preparing a special dish. (passive)
- Who invented the telephone? (passive)
- The windows have been cleaned by the students. (active)
- Switch off the fans. (passive)
- Someone has left the gate open. (passive)

Detective's motto: Find the receiver → bring it forward → BE in the same tense → V3 → "by" only if it matters.

Answers: 1. A special dish is being prepared by the chef. 2. By whom was the telephone invented? 3. The students have cleaned the windows. 4. Let the fans be switched off. 5. The gate has been left open.