




# **THE PASSIVE**

**E.O.I. Alcalá de Guadaíra  
1º Nivel Intermedio Inglés**

**2009/10**

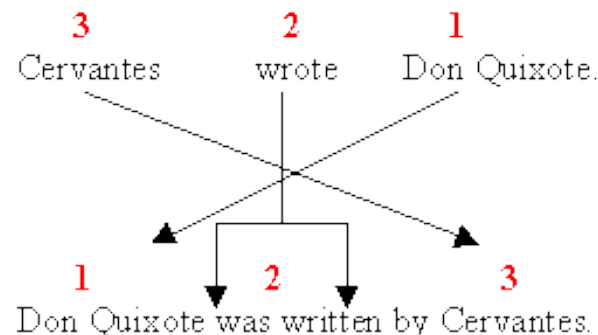
# MEANING AND USE

- Passive voice is used when the focus is on the action. It is not important or not known, however, who or what is performing the action.
  - Example: My bike was stolen.
  - In the example above, the focus is on the fact that my bike was stolen. I do not know, however, who did it.
- Sometimes a statement in passive is more polite than active voice, as the following example shows:
  - Example: A mistake was made.
  - In this case, I focus on the fact that a mistake was made, but I do not blame anyone (e.g. You have made a mistake.).
-  Please note that the passive voice is much more frequently used in English than in Spanish.



# FORM OF PASSIVE

- Subject + finite form of *to be* + Past Participle (3rd column of irregular verbs)
  - Example: A letter was written.
- When rewriting active sentences in passive voice, note the following:
  - the object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence
  - the finite form of the verb is changed (*to be* + past participle), but not the tense
  - the subject of the active sentence becomes the agent of the passive sentence (or is dropped)



# EXAMPLES OF PASSIVE I

Tense		Subject	Verb	Object
<b>Simple Present</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	writes	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	is written	by Rita.
<b>Simple Past</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	wrote	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	was written	by Rita.
<b>Present Perfect</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	has written	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	has been written	by Rita.
<b>Future I (Will)</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	will write	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	will be written	by Rita.
<b>Auxiliaries</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	can write	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	can be written	by Rita.



# EXAMPLES OF PASSIVE II

Tense		Subject	Verb	Object
<b>Present Continuous</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	is writing	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	is being written	by Rita.
<b>Past Continuous</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	was writing	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	was being written	by Rita.
<b>Past Perfect</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	had written	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	had been written	by Rita.
<b>Future II</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	will have written	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	will have been written	by Rita.
<b>Conditional I</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	would write	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	would be written	by Rita.
<b>Conditional II</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Rita	would have written	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	would have been written	by Rita.

# PASSIVE SENTENCES WITH TWO OBJECTS

	Subject	Verb	Object 1	Object 2
<b>Active:</b>	Rita	wrote	a letter	to me.
<b>Passive:</b>	A letter	was written	to me	by Rita.
<b>Passive:</b>	I	was written	a letter	by Rita.

- Rewriting an active sentence with two objects in passive voice means that one of the two objects becomes the subject, the other one remains an object. Which object to transform into a subject depends on what you want to put the focus on.
- As you can see in the examples, adding *by Rita* does not sound very elegant. That's why it is usually dropped.



# TRANSITIVE AND INTRANSITIVE VERBS

- Intransitive verbs cannot be followed by objects. They have no passive forms. Here are some common intransitive verbs:
  - ache, appear, arrive, be, come, cry, depart, die, disappear, emerge, faint, fall, go, happen, hesitate, laugh, live, look, matter, occur, rain, remain, seem, sit, snow, sleep, smile, stand, stay, talk
- Transitive non-passive verbs can be followed by an objects but do not have passive forms:
  - have, fit, suit, weigh, equal, resemble, consist, cost, lack, become
- Some verbs can be transitive or intransitive. When they are intransitive they do not have passive forms:
  - begin, break, close, end, freeze, open, start, stop



# PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL PASSIVE

- *Personal Passive* simply means that the object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence. So every verb that needs an object (transitive verb) can form a personal passive.
  - Example: They build houses. – Houses are built.
- Verbs without an object (intransitive verb) normally cannot form a personal passive sentence (as there is no object that can become the subject of the passive sentence). If you want to use an intransitive verb in passive voice, you need an impersonal construction – therefore this passive is called *Impersonal Passive*.
  - Example: he says – it is said
- *Impersonal Passive* is not as common in English as in some other languages (e.g. German, Latin). In English, *Impersonal Passive* is only possible with verbs of perception (e. g. say, think, know, believe).
  - Example: They say that women live longer than men. – It is said that women live longer than men.
- Although *Impersonal Passive* is possible here, *Personal Passive* is more common.
  - Example: They say that women live longer than men. – Women are said to live longer than men.
- The subject of the subordinate clause (women) goes to the beginning of the sentence; the verb of perception is put into passive voice. The rest of the sentence is added using an infinitive construction with 'to' (certain auxiliary verbs and *that* are dropped).
- Sometimes the term *Personal Passive* is used in English lessons if the indirect object of an active sentence is to become the subject of the passive sentence.





# REASONS FOR USING THE PASSIVE

- Use the passive when the receiver or the result of the action is more important than the agent. The passive is often used in descriptions of results and processes involving things rather than people.
  - Example: Many homes were devastated by the flood.
- Many passive sentences do not mention the agent because it is unimportant, unknown, or obvious.
  - PCs were developed to solve complex problems.
  - The book was left on my desk.
  - The mail is delivered at noon.
- The agentless passive is used to avoid very general subjects such as *people*, *we*, *one*, and impersonal *you* and *they*. The passive often sounds more indirect or impersonal:
  - ID photos are being taken today.
  - Reservations are required.
  - Calcium is needed for strong bones.
  - Parsley is an herb that is used as a garnish.
  - A serious error has been made. (we don't say who)



# TO LEARN MORE AND PRACTISE...

- **Exercises on Passive (Active → Passive)**
- Exercise on Passive with Simple Present  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Simple Past  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Present Perfect  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Future I  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Auxiliary Verbs  
Level: lower intermediate
- Mixed Exercise on Passive with Passive  
Level: lower intermediate
- Sentences with 2 Objects (Indirect Object, Personal Passive) Level: intermediate
- Sentences with 2 Objects (Direct Object)  
Level: intermediate
- Personal Passive (verbs of perception)  
Level: intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Present Progressive  
Level: upper intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Past Progressive  
Level: upper intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Past Perfect  
Level: upper intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Future II  
Level: upper intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Conditional I  
Level: upper intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Conditional II  
Level: upper intermediate
- **Exercises on Passive (Form)**
- Exercise on Passive with Simple Present  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Simple Past  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Present Perfect  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Passive with Future I  
Level: lower intermediate
- **Exercises on Passive (Active or Passive)**
- Exercise on Simple Present  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Simple Past  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Present Perfect  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise on Future I with *will*  
Level: lower intermediate
- Exercise – The Statue of Liberty  
Level: intermediate
- Exercise – Portal Dolmen Level: intermediate
- Summary – The Fellowship of the Ring, part 2, part 3 Level: intermediate
- **Grammar in Texts**
- Show Passive Voice in „The Canterville Ghost“  
Level: lower intermediate
- Grammar Exercise on „Washington, DC“  
Level: lower intermediate
- Show Passive Voice in „History of Snowboarding“  
Level: upper intermediate
- **Tests on Passive**
- Tenses Active and Passive Level: intermediate

