

The passive

When we don't know who does/did something
When it's obvious who does/did something

When it's not important who does/did something

To emphasise new information
(which appears at the end of the sentence)

To avoid starting clauses with long expressions

To produce a formal style

The car **was stolen** at approximately 1.30 am.

Having been introduced in 1988, the Road Traffic Act regulates all vehicle use on UK roads.

The XL500 **was designed** with young families in mind, so there's plenty of room in the boot.

This type of submarine **was developed** during the Second World War by the Americans.

We **were surprised** by the number of people trying to leave the city for the long weekend.

(More natural than The number of people trying to leave the city for the long weekend surprised us.)

All passengers **are required** to present their ticket to the inspector.

Impersonal passive

Form

noun + verb in passive form + infinitive
/ perfect infinitive

There + verb in passive form + infinitive
/ perfect infinitive

It + verb in passive form + that clause

Common verbs

agree, assume, believe, claim,
consider, estimate, expect, feel,
find, guarantee, know, mean,
presume, regard, report, say,
suppose, think, understand

accept, agree, argue, assume,
believe, calculate, claim, consider,
estimate, expect, feel, know,
presume, report, say, suggest,
suppose, think, understand

Example

Tourism **is expected to become** a major part of the country's economy.

There **are reported to have been** a record number of accidents on the roads this year.

It is thought that the new railway will provide employment opportunities for local people.

Direct and indirect object

Some verbs in active sentences can be followed by both a direct and an indirect object (usually a person). Common verbs include: *bring, buy, get, give, leave, lend, make, offer, owe, pass, pay, promise, refuse, send, show, take, teach, tell, write*, etc. There are two possible passive forms.

Active sentence: Michael gave the plane tickets to Jill.

With indirect object as subject of passive verb

Jill was given the plane tickets (by Michael).

With direct object as subject of passive verb

The plane tickets were given to Jill (by Michael).

Watch out!

- In the second structure in the table above, we sometimes omit the preposition before indirect object pronouns.
✓ Sharon's Rolls Royce was left **(to)** her by her grandfather.
- With the verbs *explain* and *suggest*, the preposition before indirect object pronouns cannot be omitted. They cannot be used with the first structure in the table above.
✗ I was explained how to drive the train.
✗ How to drive the train was explained me.
✓ How to drive the train **was explained to** me.