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Active and passive voice

Part 1 · Changing the focus





Grammar at a glance

When you want to...	Form to use	Worked example
Shift the focus	affected subject + be + participle	Noor paints signs. Signs are painted by Noor.
Match the new subject	was sent / were sent	Two maps were sent to us.
Keep a routine in the present	is/are + participle	The gates are checked daily.
Show work in progress	is/are being + participle	The gate is being repaired.

SELECT A ROW TO OPEN ITS LESSON

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Doer, affected participant and sentence subject



The log confirms that Lily watered the plant at 9:00 yesterday. A visitor asks what Lily did; a gardener asks what happened to the plant. Both need the same facts, but their reports can begin with different participants.

In an active clause the doer can be the subject. In a passive clause the affected person or thing can become the subject.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Start with the doer	Lily watered the plant.	Lily is the subject and the doer. The plant is the object affected by the watering.
Start with the plant	The plant was watered by Lily.	The plant becomes the subject but remains affected. By Lily still names the doer.
Remove the doer's name	The plant was watered.	This still reports the watering, but no longer names Lily. The doer is omitted, not changed into the plant.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Doer in the event	Affected participant	Passive verb group
Lily	the plant	was watered

Is the grammatical subject always the doer?

No. In The plant was watered by Lily, the plant is the subject but Lily does the watering. Identify sentence position and event role separately.

YOUR TURN

Who acts in "The wall was painted by Noor"?

The wall / Noor

> **Answer • Noor**
> The by phrase names the painter.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Agreement, pronouns and irregular participles



Lily and Sam carried one box yesterday. The delivery log also says they helped Noor and Noor wrote the label.

Build a passive with a suitable form of be and a past participle. The new subject controls agreement.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Count the new subject	The box was carried by Lily and Sam.	One box takes was. The two doers in the by phrase do not make the passive subject plural.
Change the pronoun roles	She was helped by them.	In the report “They helped her,” her becomes subject-form she and they becomes object-form them after by.
Keep the participle	The label was written by Noor.	Written is the participle of write. Wrote is the past-simple form, not the form after was in this passive.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

New subject controls agreement	Pronoun position changes	Irregular participle
one box to was	her to she; they to them	write to written

Should the passive verb agree with the nearest person in the by phrase?

No. It agrees with the passive subject. The box was carried by two helpers has a singular subject even though its named doers are plural.

YOUR TURN

Choose the singular-subject passive.

The parcel was delivered by two helpers. / The parcel were delivered by two helpers.

> Answer • The parcel was delivered by two helpers.
> Parcel controls agreement.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Present routines and preserving tense



The care schedule says Lily waters one plant every morning and the team cleans the tools every Friday. These are current routines, not completed events yesterday.

Keep the time meaning when changing voice. “They check the gates daily” becomes “The gates are checked daily.”

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Doer-centred routine	Lily waters the plant every morning.	Waters is present simple. The schedule, not a single watering image, establishes the repeated routine.
Plant-centred routine	The plant is watered by Lily every morning.	Is watered preserves the present routine. Was watered would move it to a past report.
Plural routine	The tools are cleaned every Friday.	Are agrees with plural tools. The routine’s frequency remains every Friday.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Original present routine	Passive present routine	Preserved frequency
Lily waters	the plant is watered	every morning

Does an -ed participle always make a sentence past tense?

No. Is watered is present passive, was watered is past passive, and will be watered is future passive. Identify the entire verb group.

YOUR TURN

Present passive with plural parcels: choose the group.

was checked / are checked

> **Answer • are checked**
> Plural present subject takes are.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Continuous passives and descriptions of states



The live log says Lily is watering the plant now and was watering it at yesterday's 9:00 bell. A separate gate notice simply says the gate is open.

Is being or are being followed by a past participle describes ongoing work. A plain description can instead describe a state.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Live action	The plant is being watered by Lily now.	Is being watered preserves the action in progress. Being belongs to the continuous passive group.
Past background	The plant was being watered when the bell rang.	Was being watered locates the ongoing action at yesterday's bell; it does not by itself say the bell stopped it.
A state description	The gate is open.	Open describes the gate's state here. A form of be is not enough to identify a passive.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Present progress	Past progress	State description
is being watered	was being watered	is open

Is every sentence with is, was or were passive?

No. Lily is happy and The gate is open describe states. Passive identification needs the construction and meaning, not simply the presence of be.

YOUR TURN

Choose the present-continuous passive group.

is being repaired / is been repaired

> **Answer • is being repaired**
> Use being after present be for this passive.

ONE LAST CHALLENGE

What is happening to the bridge?

The crew is painting the bridge right now. Put the bridge first and keep the action in progress.



A POSSIBLE ANSWER

The bridge is being painted by the crew.

Is being painted keeps the ongoing meaning and makes the bridge the subject.

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