



What are some of the most pressing environmental problems facing your city, your country, or the world today? Are there any obvious solutions?

GOALS

- Learn why mastering the passive voice is important in writing
- Understand four problems writers commonly encounter with the passive voice
- Form and use the passive voice correctly in exercises and writing assignments

LEARN WHAT THE ERROR IS

Errors with the Passive Voice

In English, most verbs can be used in either the active voice or the passive voice. In the sentence *The bookstore sells computer supplies*, the verb is in the active voice because the subject is doing the action. In the sentence *Our teachers will be moved to temporary offices this spring*, the verb is in the passive voice because the subject is being acted upon. The doer of the action is not named; “by someone” is understood. However, in the sentence *Our Spanish textbook was written by my teacher*, the doer of the action—“my teacher”—is mentioned. The writer chooses whether or not to name the doer of the action depending on how important it is for the reader to have that information.

An error with the passive voice occurs when a verb in the passive voice has been incorrectly formed or when the passive voice has been used where the active voice is needed. The editing symbol for an error with the passive is *pass*.

A problem with the passive voice may occur when the active voice is preferable to the passive voice in a sentence. In that case, your instructor may use an alternative symbol, *wk pass* (for weak passive).

The verb *be* + the past participle, as in the sentence *The lake is situated halfway between the two towns*, is sometimes considered a passive construction (called the stative passive). Errors in this type of formation are treated in this unit and in Unit 2, “Verb Forms.”

Errors with the passive voice are global (more serious) errors and can affect the meaning of individual sentences, parts of a paragraph, and whole paragraphs. In formal writing, knowing how to use the passive voice correctly is very important. Although a sentence in the passive voice may be grammatically correct, it may not be the best choice in a piece of writing. Rather, the decision of whether or not to use the passive voice should be based upon whether the subject of the sentence is doing the action or being acted upon.

Knowing how to form the passive voice correctly is very important. If the passive voice is incorrectly formed in a sentence, the reader will try to supply its correct form but may be confused about whether the writer intended to use the active or passive voice.

In academic and professional writing, the writer uses both active and passive voice; therefore, it is essential that writers master the use and formation of the passive voice.

Suggestions for Reducing Errors

- Memorize how to form the passive voice so that you can do so automatically. (Consult the charts in the Review Grammar Solutions section of this unit.)
- Make sure the verb you have chosen can be used in the passive voice by checking your dictionary to find out whether or not the verb is transitive (takes a direct object and can be made passive, like the verbs *collect*, *teach*, or *follow*) or intransitive (does not take a direct object and cannot be made passive, like the verbs *arrive*, *exist*, or *stay*).
- Compare the way the two voices are used when you are reading textbooks, the newspaper, or magazine articles. In particular, try to determine why the author used the passive instead of the active voice and whether you think its use is effective.
- If you need to write a scientific paper or a laboratory report, examine similar papers in that field or any sample papers the instructor has provided so that you can see the balance of active and passive voice. If you are in doubt, ask your instructor for help.

Write answers to the following questions. Share your answers with another student.

1. What two voices can verbs have in English?
2. What kinds of verbs cannot be made passive and why?

GRAMMAR JOURNAL ENTRY 5 THE PASSIVE VOICE

Respond to the following in your grammar journal.

1. What is the best gift that has ever been given to you and why?
2. Write two sample sentences, one in the active voice and the other in the passive voice. Label each one correctly.

UNDERSTAND COMMON PROBLEMS

This section presents three problems that writers commonly encounter with the passive voice. First, take the pre-test to see what you already know about the passive voice. When you finish, check your answers on page 351. Then, carefully study each problem and the examples that illustrate it. Pay particular attention to those problems that correspond to the pre-test questions you had difficulty with. Remember that becoming aware of the types of errors you most often make with the passive voice will increase your chances of avoiding these errors in your writing.

Pre-test

What Do You Already Know?

Test your ability to recognize and correct errors with the passive voice.

A Correct the marked errors. These are examples of the three problems that are presented in this unit.

Problem 1 Some math problems ^{*pass*} can be solve very easily.

Problem 2 The speaker's question ^{*pass*} directed at the younger members of the audience.

Problem 3 While in New York City last month, we ^{*pass*} were stayed in a hotel near Wall Street.

B Underline and correct the one error in each of the following sentences. (The errors are not in any particular order.)

1. My friends had already been arrived when I got to the airport.
2. The textbook send to him yesterday by priority mail.
3. Many of the books I want have already been check out from the library.

Three Common Problems

Incorrect: Some pronunciation problems ^{*pass*} can be fix easily.

Correct: Some pronunciation problems can be fixed easily.

Note: Some instructors may choose to mark this error as

vf (verb form).

Problem 1

The passive voice has been incorrectly formed.

Incorrect: Your grades ^{pass} will sent next week.

Incorrect: Your grades ^{pass} will being sent next week.

Correct: Your grades will be sent next week.

Incorrect: A new air conditioner ^{pass} will install next week.

Correct: A new air conditioner will be installed next week. (The air conditioner cannot install itself; it must be installed by someone.)

Incorrect: It is possible that life ^{pass} is existed on planets other than ours.

Correct: It is possible that life exists on planets other than ours.

Incorrect: A power failure ^{pass} was occurred last month.

Correct: A power failure occurred last month.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: If you are unsure whether a verb is transitive or intransitive, check the verb in a dictionary.

REVIEW GRAMMAR SOLUTIONS

A proficient writer knows when to choose the active or the passive voice. In expository writing, the active voice is generally a better choice than the passive voice except in cases where the writer wants to emphasize what has happened rather than who or what caused the action. In scientific and technical writing, the passive voice is often preferred so that the emphasis is on the experiment or the phenomenon, not on the researcher(s).

Remember that while a sentence with the passive voice may be grammatically correct, the writer must choose either the active or passive voice to effectively express what he or she wants to say. The following guidelines can help you learn how to form and decide when to use the passive voice in expository writing.

Passive Voice of Verb Tenses

The passive voice is formed by using *to be* in whatever tense the writer selects and then adding the past participle. To form the negative of the passive, use *not*.

Examples:

The Internet connection has not been fixed at my apartment.

The bottles are not sealed at the factory.

The present and past perfect progressive, the future progressive, and the future perfect progressive are not used in the passive voice.

VERB-TENSE FORMATION IN PASSIVE VOICE

| PRESENT | EXAMPLES |
|--|---|
| <i>am, is, are + past participle</i> | Mail <u>is delivered</u> every day except Sunday. |
| PRESENT PROGRESSIVE | |
| <i>am being, is being, are being + past participle</i> | A new addition <u>is being added</u> to the library. |
| PAST | |
| <i>was, were + past participle</i> | The grades <u>were posted</u> by the teaching assistant at 3:00 PM. |
| PAST PROGRESSIVE | |
| <i>was being, were being + past participle</i> | When I arrived, the corrected quizzes <u>were just being distributed</u> . |
| PRESENT PERFECT | |
| <i>has been, have been + past participle</i> | The money <u>has already been sent</u> electronically by the bank. |
| PAST PERFECT | |
| <i>had been + past participle</i> | All the food <u>had been eaten</u> when I arrived at the potluck dinner. |
| FUTURE | |
| <i>will be + past participle</i> | The tests <u>will be given back</u> on Thursday. |
| FUTURE PERFECT | |
| <i>will have been + past participle</i> | By the time we arrive at the concert hall, all the free tickets <u>will have been given out</u> . |

Passive Voice of Modal Verb Phrases

In a modal verb phrase, the passive is formed by adding *be* + the past participle after the modal for the present tense and *have been* + the past participle after the modal for the past tense.

| PRESENT | EXAMPLES |
|--|---|
| modal + <i>be</i> + past participle | Spelling <u>can be checked</u> on a computer. Backpacks <u>should not be left</u> unattended in the library. |
| PAST | EXAMPLES |
| modal + <i>have been</i> + past participle | It is possible that the train <u>could have been delayed</u> . She <u>should not have been elected</u> chair of the committee. |

Passive Voice of Conditional Verb Phrases

In a conditional sentence, the passive voice can be used in the condition clause, the result clause, or both. To correctly form the passive voice in a conditional sentence, use the guidelines for forming the passive voice of verb tenses and modal verb phrases in this section. The chart below shows examples of the passive voice in conditional sentences.

| | EXAMPLES |
|--|---|
| Factual conditional | If Ben makes a mistake, he <u>is corrected</u> by his friend. |
| Hypothetical conditional (present or future) | If the computer software <u>were shipped</u> tonight, it would arrive tomorrow. (<u>was</u> becomes <u>were</u> in the <i>if</i> clause) |
| Hypothetical conditional (past) | If the dam <u>had not been repaired</u> , we would have had a flood last spring. |

Passive of Infinitives, Gerunds, and Participles

1. Infinitives in the passive voice

| | |
|---|---|
| PRESENT | EXAMPLE |
| to + <i>be</i> + past participle | She arranged for the test <u>to be given</u> Monday. |
| PERFECT (OR PAST) | EXAMPLE |
| to + <i>have been</i> + past participle | The results were supposed <u>to have been sent</u> yesterday. |

2. Gerunds in the passive voice

| | |
|--|---|
| PRESENT | EXAMPLES |
| <i>being</i> + past participle | He did not like <u>being called</u> Jim instead of James. <u>Being awakened</u> in the middle of the night by a telephone call upset George. |
| PERFECT (OR PAST) | EXAMPLE |
| <i>having + been</i> + past participle | After <u>having been told</u> to go from one office to another, Phil finally found where to turn in his application. |

3. Participial phrases in the passive voice

| | |
|---|---|
| PRESENT | EXAMPLE |
| base form + <i>-ing</i> + past participle | <u>Being surrounded</u> by all her friends and <u>feeling supported</u> by them, Janice no longer felt nervous about giving the speech. |
| PERFECT (OR PAST) | EXAMPLE |
| <i>having been</i> + past participle | <u>Having been rejected</u> for the position, my cousin decided to apply for a different job. |

The Stative Passive

Another form of the passive is the stative passive. It is formed by the verb *to be* (or verbs like *seem*, *appear*, or *feel*) + the past participle. This formation expresses a state of being. Some grammar books treat it as a passive without an agent while others consider it as a verb + adjective. The verbs used to form this type of passive are called stative verbs.

Examples:

Peter is finished with his paper and is satisfied with his work.

Kirsten has been exhausted ever since she finished her dissertation.

My roommate felt discouraged after she received her scores.

The following are two common errors that occur with the stative passive formation.

Incorrect: My brother confined to his apartment because he has the flu.
(The verb *is* has been left out.)

Incorrect: My brother is confine to his apartment because he has the flu.
(The past participle is incorrectly formed.)

Correct: My brother is confined to his apartment because he has the flu.

Common Uses of the Passive Voice

1. To express something that happened to the subject

Example:

The new bridge was completed last week.

Note: The agent, or doer of the action, may or may not be mentioned, depending upon whether the agent is known or how important it is to know the agent.

2. To explain how something was done or what methodology was used

Examples:

The data were analyzed and the results were recorded.

The forms were completed and sent to the physician yesterday.

3. To describe a process

Examples:

Water can be purified by boiling it for a period of time.

Each letter should be drafted, typed, and proofread before it is sent out.

4. To express a state

Examples:

Brendan was relieved to see his sister at the airport.

The library is located near the administration building.

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE

AVOIDING WORDINESS

You can use the active voice to avoid wordiness. A passive construction can sometimes make a sentence wordy—which, of course, will negatively affect the writer's style.

Examples:

It is stated by the author that Mondays are depressing. (passive voice, ten words)

The author states that Mondays are depressing. (active voice, seven words)

You can reduce the passive verb phrase to avoid wordiness as well as vary your style.

Examples:

The air samples were analyzed and the results were recorded.

The air samples were analyzed and the results recorded.

USING PASSIVE VOICE IN SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL WRITING AND FACTUAL REPORTING

In scientific and technical writing, the passive voice is often preferred so that the emphasis is on the experiment or the situation itself, not on the researcher(s).

Examples:

The dragonflies were collected and then kept at 2°C for four hours.

The software should be updated regularly.

In reporting, the passive voice is also preferred in some cases as in the examples below.

Examples:

More thunderstorms are expected to hit the Southland late Sunday, but the rainfall is expected to be considerably less than that of last week's storm. More showers and thunderstorms are predicted through Wednesday, with a heavy surf advisory until 10:00 AM today. A 48-year-old man was rescued early Saturday morning after high waves knocked him off his surfboard and he was swept under.

The president was reported to have suffered a fall last night at the hotel where he was staying. At this time, no details have been released to the press. The president will be transported by helicopter to a military hospital later this morning for an examination. At that time, his press secretary will hold a press conference.

In the above examples, the passive voice has been used to keep the focus on the subject or to keep the source of the information confidential.

INEFFECTIVE USE OF THE PASSIVE VOICE

*It is important for writers to be aware of ineffective use of the passive voice. The symbol for such use is **wk pass**—weak passive.*

In the following short paragraph, the passive voice has been used ineffectively. There is no focus on who performed the actions.

Listing my ideas in a disorganized way is a second weakness of mine in writing. Organization was not adequately taught in my high school. My thoughts were scribbled in list form and were accepted by my instructors.

In the revised paragraph below, the writer uses the active voice, and the paragraph now focuses on the writer doing the action.

Listing my ideas in a disorganized way is a second weakness of mine in writing. Organization was not adequately taught in my high school. I merely scribbled out my thoughts in list form and my instructors accepted them.

While the sentences in the first paragraph are grammatically correct, the use of the active voice in the revised paragraph in the last sentence makes the paragraph flow better.

PRACTICE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Fill in the correct form of the passive voice. Use the verb tense indicated.

1. Present

All of the participants in the race _____ (invite) to the awards ceremony.

2. Present progressive

Applications for part-time jobs _____ (accept) from now until the end of the month.

3. Past

Volkan told me that the concert _____ (cancel), so I did not go.

4. Present perfect

Do you know whether or not the package _____ (send)?

5. Past perfect

The officer announced that the suspects _____ (arrest) for the crime.

6. Future

Stanley does not have to buy a plane ticket; it _____ (take care of) by his assistant.

7. Future perfect

By the time I get home, I hope that the dishes _____ (wash) by my roommates.

8. Infinitive

Johnson expects _____ (lay off) next month because the store is experiencing financial problems. (present)

The building was expected _____ (complete) by now, but only the foundation has been laid. (perfect or past)

9. Gerund

Marilyn did not anticipate _____ (charge) a late fee for the library book. (present)

_____ (accept) by Yale should have pleased Kim, but she really wanted to go to Harvard. (perfect or past)

10. Modal

I am afraid that the date _____ (might, change). (present time)

Do you think this box _____ (might, deliver) to my house by mistake? (past time)

11. Conditional

If the English test _____ (can, postpone), I would be very relieved.

12. Participial phrases

1. _____ (applaud) so warmly by the audience, the piano player began to play even more enthusiastically. (present)

2. _____ (win) the lottery, the recipient announced that he was going to buy a new house. (perfect).

EXERCISE 2

Directions: Change the underlined verbs or infinitives in the following sentences from the active voice to the passive voice, if possible. Make other changes in the sentences as necessary. Be particularly careful to use the correct formation of the passive voice for the verb tense you are using.

Example: The Red Cross collected canned food and clothes for the earthquake victims. (active)

Canned food and clothes were collected for the earthquake victims by the Red Cross. (passive)

1. Most restaurants accept credit cards.

2. They must have torn down the bookstore since I was there in March.

3. The teacher expects the students to do the assignment before class.

4. If the temperature had dropped last night, snow would have fallen

5. The reporter interrupted the program for a special bulletin on the approaching storm.

6. By the time I get home, the letter carrier will have delivered the mail.

7. At the end of the school year, teachers and students are ready for summer vacation.

8. The university press has published Dr. Robertson's book.

9. If they cannot change the meeting location, they should reschedule the meeting.

10. Although I had invited six people for dinner, only three came.

11. I would have taken advantage of the field trip if the instructor had announced it earlier.

12. Tom must have broken his foot in the accident as he is wearing a cast.

EXERCISE 3

Directions: Correct the passive voice formation error by writing in the correct answer above the sentence.

Example: When I was walking in the streets of Taiwan, Chinese ~~was speaking~~ ^{was being spoken} all around me.

1. We constantly being asked by the government for more taxes.
2. My conversation with her conducted in Vietnamese.
3. Are you sure that the bakery is still existed?
4. Juan has the honor of having awarded the prize for the best attendance.
5. A solid friendship create between them because of their common interest in soccer.
6. My fear about speaking English in public was contributed to my shyness.

7. This English class offer only to nonnative speakers.
8. When the announcement was been made, some students were not there.
9. Many English words derived from Latin.

EXERCISE 4

Directions: The writer of this paragraph has elected to use some verbs in the passive voice. Underline each passive construction. With your classmate, identify two passive constructions that you might change from the passive to the active voice.

Although riding the train has been negatively labeled as nostalgic in our car-dependent society and many trains have long ceased to exist, a short commuter train ride can be a unique trip into the past—and a beautiful ride. On a recent short train trip, I was thrilled by the variety of bird life in the salt marsh the train passed through. In fact, the train was virtually ignored by the stately white egrets, shiny red-winged blackbirds, and plump mallard ducks. As we moved out of the marsh and glided along the water's edge, we were greeted by fishermen out to try their luck for the day. Farther from shore lay the oil tankers, and behind them, in the distance, the bay was decorated with white sails. As we approached the city, I wondered whether there was anything left to be seen. To my surprise, I found myself looking into people's backyards, catching glimpses of downtown streets, and, best of all, being treated to a panoramic view of the highway. There cars were creeping along, bumper to bumper, while out on the tracks, we peacefully glided by, rocking gently on the rails. I like to think that as our whistle tooted, it may have been heard by a driver out there who wished he or she were riding on the train.

Post-test

What Do You Know Now?

A Fill in each blank with the correct passive voice of the verb in parentheses.

1. **Present**

Hurricane Katrina _____ (view) by many Americans as one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States.

2. Present progressive

Today is July 4th. All over the United States, the holiday _____
(celebrate) with parades and fireworks.

3. Future

Next week, flu shots _____ (give) at the clinic. I recommend
that you get one.

4. Future perfect

By next week, all of the popular classes _____ (fill).

5. Past tense

My roommate _____ (assign) to a study group by her
professor, but she has never attended it.

6. Past progressive

When I went home last weekend, I was surprised to see that a new
house _____ (build) on my street.

7. Present perfect

It _____ (point) out that writing clearly is important in all
academic disciplines.

8. Past perfect

During high school, she _____ (introduce) to several
computer programming languages and that has helped her greatly in
college.

9. Infinitive

My professor hopes _____ (recognize) as a prominent
researcher in genetics after her next publication comes out.

10. Gerund

_____ (name) the most valuable player on his soccer team
was a great honor for my brother.

B Rewrite each sentence, changing the underlined verbs or verbals to passive, if possible. Make any other necessary changes in the sentence, but do not change the verb tense.

1. Scientists often announce their new discoveries in *Science* magazine.

2. Scientists have recently announced the discovery of a new kind of eye cell.

3. Dr. David Berson described this discovery in last week's issue of *Science*.

4. These eye cells may control the body's internal clock.

5. Before this discovery, scientists believed that the eye had only two types of light-sensitive cells.

6. Now scientists have a new way of understanding how the nervous system interprets light.

7. Researchers are currently studying these cells in mice and expect to find similar cells in humans.

8. Scientists expect to apply the new information to disorders, such as jet lag.

C Decide whether the use of the passive voice in the following sentences is correct (C) or incorrect (I). If it is incorrect, make the correction.

___ 1. His attitude towards doing homework is concerned his parents

___ 2. An announcement is being made right now about a flight delay, so we need to listen carefully.

- ___ 3. Tom is telling the truth. That is exactly what is happened.
- ___ 4. The new building was design and construct two years ago.
- ___ 5. Jennifer has just been offered the job.

D Correct the underlined errors in the following paragraph.

As the end of fall semester approaches, students often feel very stress.
(1)

One reason is that many of them could not do much schoolwork over the Thanksgiving break because they were visiting family and friends. Another reason is that the semester is not yet over, and there are tests to be taken, end-of-the-quarter papers to be finish, and other deadlines to be met.
(2)

Also, some feel confuse because they cannot remember what was cover
(3) (4)

in class the last few weeks. Although holidays are wonderful, getting back into the rhythm of classes again is difficult. Because stress can interfere with academic success, places have be set up on many campuses where
(5)

students can be relax. Research has even shown that a 20-minute nap
(6)

can significantly reduce stress. Most important for students, however, is to realize that stress is existed as a part of student life and that they can learn
(7)

skills to manage it so that it does not interfere with their academic success.

APPLY WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED TO WRITING

Select a writing topic and follow the steps in Appendix A on page 337.

Topic 1:

Identify a serious environmental problem facing the world—or a specific part of the world—today. First, explain the problem, giving some of the major causes and/or effects. Then, suggest possible ways of addressing the problem.



Topic 2:

What is one of the most important discoveries that has been made and how, in your opinion, have humans benefited from it?



Topic 3:

In recent years, public art—art that is displayed in public places, such as airports or parks—has become increasingly popular. What, in your opinion, is the value of such art to society?

