

Basic English Grammar



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The Passive in the Past

Week 7 – Lecture 7

The Passive

English uses the passive voice in the past to stress the effect of an action that happened in the past, rather than the cause of that action.

How to turn an active sentence into a passive sentence?

1. Identify the subject, the verb, and the object.
2. Move the object to become the new subject of the sentence.
3. Check the verb tense in the active sentence.
4. Conjugate the verb “be”.
5. Add the past participle (verb 3) of the main verb after “be”.
6. Subject of the active sentence.



**THE PAST
SIMPLE
PASSIVE**

The Past Simple Passive

PAST SIMPLE

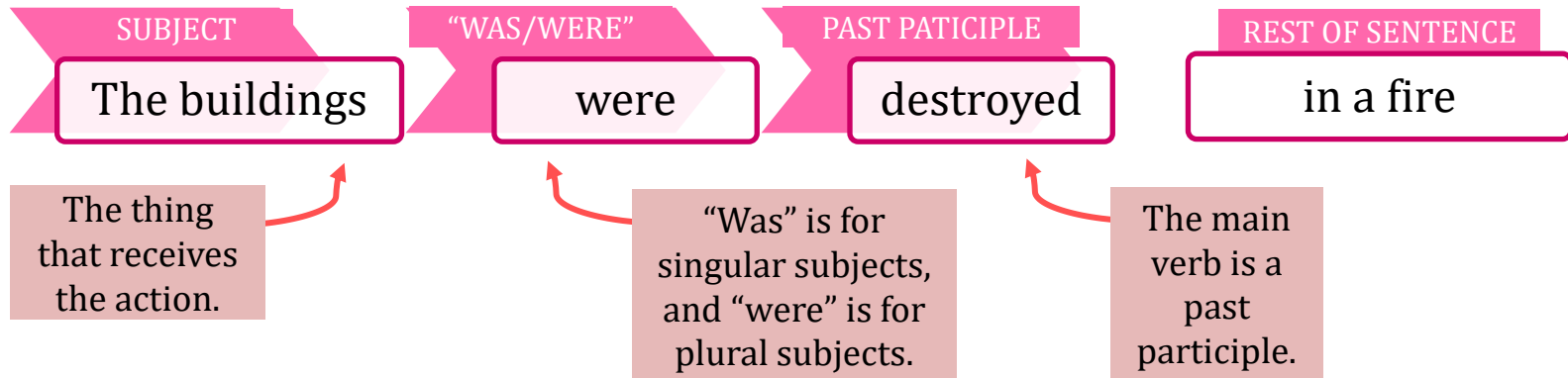
The fire **destroyed** the buildings.

The buildings **were destroyed** by the fire.

PAST SIMPLE PASSIVE

HOW TO FORM

All passives use a form of “be” with a past participle. The agent (the thing doing the action) can be introduced with “by”, but the sentence would still make sense without it.



Further examples

1. The trees **were cut down** last year.
2. The rail road **was damaged** during the storm.
3. Two people **were injured** in the accident.
4. The church in my town **was built** in 1982.
5. Patrick **was surrounded** by all the books he had to read.
6. Andre's birthday cake **was made** by his grandmother.

Match the active sentences to the equivalent passive sentences.

1. People ate all of the cake that Jemima had made.

2. The thieves stole all the money from the bank's safe.

3. Someone injured my brother in a car accident yesterday.

4. They didn't inform me that the office was closed on Friday.

5. My father repaired the roof last afternoon.

I wasn't informed that the office was closed on Friday.

The roof was repaired by my father last afternoon.

All of the cake that Jemima had made was eaten.

My brother was injured in a car accident yesterday.

All the money from the bank's safe was stolen.

Answers:

1. People ate all of the cake that Jemima had made.

2. The thieves stole all the money from the bank's safe.

3. Someone injured my brother in a car accident yesterday.

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Answers:

1. People **ate** all of the cake that Jemima had made.
 2. The thieves **stole** all the money from the bank's safe.
 3. Someone **injured** my brother in a car accident yesterday.
 4. They **didn't inform** me that the office was closed on Friday.
 5. My father **repaired** the roof last afternoon.
-
- The diagram consists of five yellow arrows pointing from the active voice sentences on the left to their corresponding passive voice sentences on the right. The connections are as follows: Arrow 1 from item 1 to item 2; Arrow 2 from item 2 to item 5; Arrow 3 from item 3 to item 4; Arrow 4 from item 4 to item 1; Arrow 5 from item 5 to item 3.
- I **wasn't informed** that the office was closed on Friday.
 - The roof **was repaired** by my father last afternoon.
 - All of the cake that Jemima had made **was eaten**.
 - My brother **was injured** in a car accident yesterday.
 - All the money from the bank's safe **was stolen**.



**THE PAST
CONTINUOUS
PASSIVE**

The past continuous passive

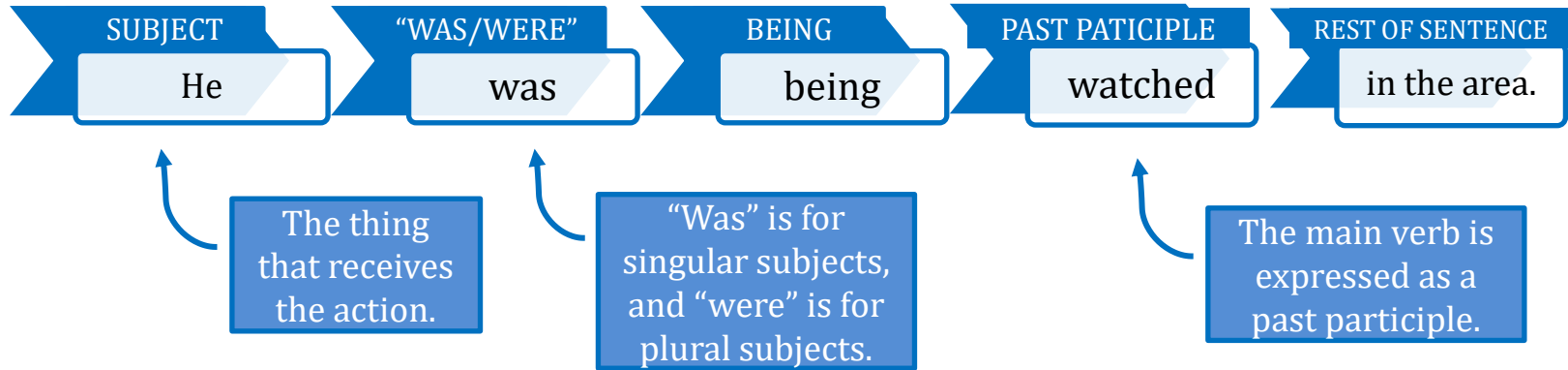
PAST CONTINUOUS

Secret agents **were watching** him.

He **was being watched** by secret agents.

PAST CONTINUOUS PASSIVE

HOW TO FORM



Further examples

1. The students **were being taught** how to write good essays.
2. By the time I got back to my car, it **was being taken** away.
3. I went for lunch while my car **was being fixed**.
4. The new secretary **was being shown** how to use the computer.
5. We bought our house while it **was being built**.
6. The victims **were being investigated** by the police.
7. Our cat **was being looked** after by a friend.

Change the active sentences into the passive sentences

1. The chefs were cooking lots of food for the party.
2. A man in hat was following the spy.
3. They were building lots of tower blocks in the suburbs.
4. My mother was cleaning the entire house.
5. Alan was cutting the grass when the snake appeared.

Answers:

1. The chefs were cooking lots of food for the party.

Lots of food was being cooked for the party.

2. A man in hat was following the spy.

The spy was being followed by a man in hat.

3. They were building lots of tower blocks in the suburbs.

Lots of tower blocks were being built in the suburbs.

4. My mother was cleaning the entire house.

The entire house was being cleaned by my mother.

5. Alan was cutting the grass when the snake appeared.

The grass was being cut when the snake appeared.

Answers:

1. The chefs **were cooking** lots of food for the party.

*Lots of food **was being cooked** for the party.*

2. A man in hat **was following** the spy.

*The spy **was being followed** by a man in hat.*

3. They **were building** lots of tower blocks in the suburbs.

*Lots of tower blocks **were being built** in the suburbs.*

4. My mother **was cleaning** the entire house.

*The entire house **was being cleaned** by my mother.*

5. Alan **was cutting** the grass when the snake appeared.

*The grass **was being cut** when the snake appeared.*



**THE PAST
PERFECT
PASSIVE**

The past perfect passive

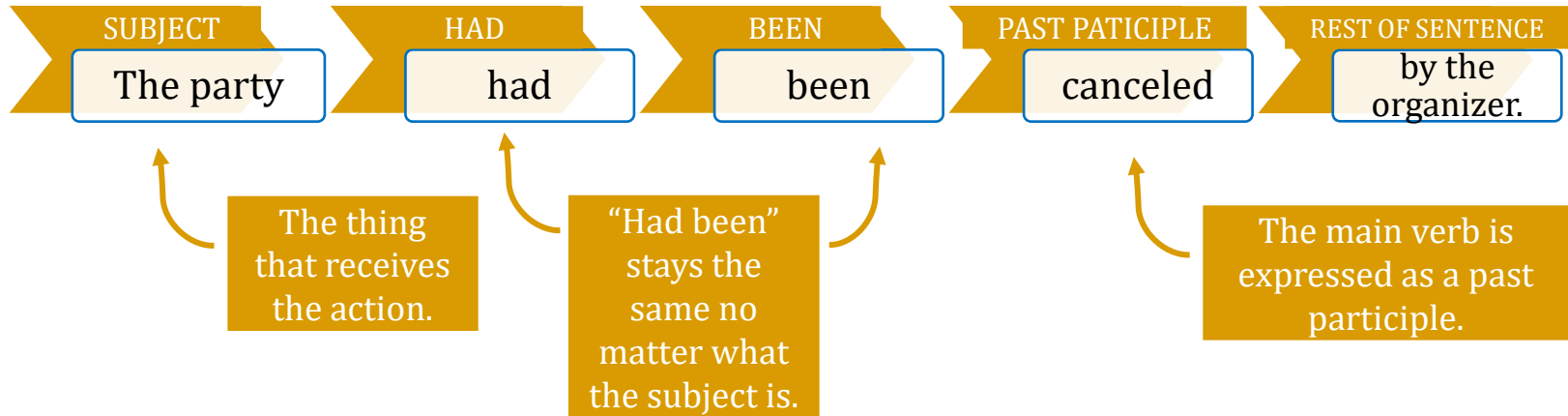
PAST PERFECT

Unfortunately, the organizer **had canceled** the party.

Unfortunately, the party **had been canceled**.

PAST PERFECT PASSIVE

HOW TO FORM



Further examples

1. This part of the Arctic **had** never **been explored** before.
2. The class **hadn't been told** that the lecture had been canceled.
3. Sisca didn't realize that the floor **had** just **been polished**.
4. We were about to sing Happy Birthday, but the cake **had been eaten**.
5. Anna was so happy that her cat **had been found**.

Rewrite the sentences using the past perfect passive!

1. Dr. Richard had saved Silvia's life.
2. Daniel hadn't cleaned his room in weeks.
3. The little girl had broken the window.
4. The Americans had discovered another planet.
5. Had Dorothy solved the problems?
6. Those prisoners had robbed five banks.
7. Hospital staff hadn't accepted the injured man.

Answers:

1. Silvia's life **had been saved** by Dr. Richard.
2. Daniel's room **hadn't been cleaned** in weeks.
3. The window **had been broken** the little girl.
4. Another planet **had been discovered** by the Americans.
5. **Had** the problems **been solved** by Dorothy?
6. Five banks **had been robbed** by those prisoners.
7. The injured man **hadn't been accepted** by hospital staff.

Thank you!

REFERENCES

Murphy, Raymond & Smalzer, William. *Grammar in use, Intermediate*. Cambridge U. Press, 2019.

DK. *English for Everyone – English Grammar Guide*. Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2016.