

Communicative English Language Skills II

Lecture 4

Grammar: Passive Voice

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Grammar Focus: Active and Passive Voice

Welcome to our fourth lecture in Communicative English Language Skills II.

- ✓ Today we dive into a fundamental area of English grammar that can greatly strengthen your academic and professional writing: the Active and Passive Voice.
- ✓ This session builds directly on the grammar and writing skills you developed so far
- ✓ Mastering active and passive structures is essential for technical reporting and formal communication in your fields.

Outline

The following concepts will be introduced in the lecture.

- Sentence Components Review (S-V-O)
- Core Concepts: Active vs. Passive Voice
- Reasons for Using Passive Voice
- Passive Voice Formation across Tenses
- Contextual Applications (Technical, News, and Academic)
- Advanced Passive Structures (Gerunds, Infinitives, and Impersonal)
- Common Mistakes and Error Correction
- Stylistic Guidelines: When to Avoid Passive Voice

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Lesson Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- ❖ Distinguish between Active and Passive voices.
- ❖ Identify the structure of passive sentences across various tenses.
- ❖ Transform sentences from active to passive correctly.
- ❖ Apply passive voice in academic and technical contexts (e.g., lab reports, etc.,).
- ❖ Implement when to omit or include the agent (the 'by' phrase).

Review: Sentence Components

To understand voice, we must first revisit the basic components of a sentence that we learnt so far. Every standard sentence has a subject, a verb, and often an object.

Subject-Verb-Object (S-V-O)

- Subject: The 'doer' or the focus of the sentence.
- Verb: The action or state of being.
- Object: The receiver of the action.

Example: The technician (S) repaired (V) the sewing machine (O).

Understanding 'Voice' in Grammar: What is it?

- ✓ Voice in grammar is not about how loudly we speak.
- ✓ It shows the relationship between the verb's action and its participants (the subject and object).

Active Voice

- ✓ The subject is the doer (the one who performs the action).
- ✓ Conceptual focus: Who is doing the action?

Passive Voice

- ✓ The subject is the receiver of the action.
- ✓ Conceptual focus: What/who is affected by the action?

Conceptual Shift

- ✓ Active: Subject performs the action.
- ✓ Passive: Subject receives the action (the former object moves into the subject position).

The Active Voice

- Focus: Agent (the doer)
- Structure: Subject + Verb + Object

Examples

- The manager signed the contract.
- Researchers discovered a new textile dye.
- ❖ Active voice is the most common way we communicate daily.
- ❖ It is direct and clear.

The subject (e.g., the manager / researchers) is emphasized because they are the ones doing the action.

- ❖ Active Voice is characterized by directness and focus on the agent.

The Passive Voice

Focus: Action or the Receiver

Structure: Object (becomes Subject) + “be” verb + Past Participle (+ by agent)

Examples

- The contract was signed by the manager.
- A new textile dye was discovered.

In passive voice, the receiver of the action (e.g., the contract / the textile dye) moves to the front of the sentence. We use a form of the verb “to be” + the past participle of the main verb.

The doer is either: added at the end in a “by” phrase, or left out entirely. Passive voice changes focus from the doer to what/who is affected by the action.

Why Use Passive Voice?

- Reason 1: The Agent is Unknown
- We use passive voice when we don't know who performed the action.
- Example: The warehouse was broken into last night. (We don't know who the burglars were.)

Thus, one major reason is when we simply don't know who performed the action.

For instance, if a warehouse was broken into, we focus on the fact that the break-in happened. Since the identity of the burglars is unknown, the passive voice is the most logical choice.

Why Use Passive Voice?...Cont'd

Reason 2: The Agent is Obvious

We use passive voice when the performer is so obvious it doesn't need mentioning.

- Example: The thief was arrested.
- (It is obvious that the police did the arresting.)

On the flip side, we use passive voice when the agent is so obvious that mentioning them would be redundant. If we say "The thief was arrested," we don't need to say "by the police," because in our society, only the police have the authority to make arrests. The passive voice keeps our communication concise.

Why Use Passive Voice?...cont'd

Reason 3: Focus on the Action/Process

- Crucial for technical writing and industrial descriptions.
- Example: The fabric is woven using high-speed looms.
- (The focus is on the manufacturing process, not the specific worker.)

This third reason is particularly important for your studies in technology and production. When we describe a process, like how fabric is made, the individual worker isn't the point. The process itself is. By saying "The fabric is woven," we keep the reader's attention on the manufacturing step. This is a hallmark of professional technical writing.

Why Use Passive Voice?...cont'd

- Reason 4: Objectivity in Academic Writing in lab reports and scientific papers to remain neutral.
- Active: I mixed the chemicals. (Too personal)
- Passive: The chemicals were mixed. (Objective/Scientific)

In your lab reports, objectivity is everything. Science is about repeatable results, not about who performed the experiment. If you write "I mixed the chemicals," it sounds like a personal diary. But if you write "The chemicals were mixed," it sounds like a formal scientific record. This is why mastering the passive voice is essential for your academic success.

Forming the Passive: Tense Overview

Now, let's get into the mechanics. The "Golden Rule" for forming the passive voice is to use the correct form of the verb "to be" followed by the past participle—which is the third form of the verb. If the original sentence is in the present tense, we use 'am', 'is', or 'are'. If it's in the past, we use 'was' or 'were'. Let's look at how this changes across all tenses.

The Golden Rule of Passive Transformation

Form: Form of 'To Be' + Past Participle (V3)

Tense	'Be' Verb Form	Example
Present Simple	am/is/are	is made
Past Simple	was/were	was made

Simple Present Passive

In the Simple Present, we use 'am', 'is', or 'are'. Example:

"The factory produces shirts." Since "shirts" is plural, we use "are."

"Produces" becomes "produced." Notice how the focus shifts from the factory to the output of shirts.

1. Simple Present

- Structure: am/is/are + Past Participle
- Active: The factory produces 1,000 shirts daily.
- Passive: 1,000 shirts are produced daily by the factory.

Simple Past Passive

2. Simple Past

For the Simple Past, we simply switch to 'was' or 'were'.

- Structure: was/were + Past Participle
- Active: The designer created the pattern yesterday.
- Passive: The pattern was created yesterday by the designer.

Present Continuous Passive

3. Present Continuous

- Structure: am/is/are + being + Past Participle
- Active: The tailors are sewing the uniforms now.
- Passive: The uniforms are being sewn now by the tailors.

The continuous tenses can be a bit tricky. We have to maintain the "ing" feeling of the active sentence. To do this, we add the word "being" between the 'be' verb and the past participle. So, "are sewing" becomes "are being sewn." This indicates that the action is happening right at this moment.

Past Continuous Passive

4. Past Continuous

- Structure: was/were + being + Past Participle
- Active: They were testing the new machinery.
- Passive: The new machinery was being tested.

Hence, for the Past Continuous, we use "was being" or "were being." In the example above, "the new machinery" is singular, so we use "was being tested." This describes an action that was in progress at a specific time in the past.

Present Perfect Passive

5. Present Perfect

- Structure: have/has + been + Past Participle
- Active: The committee has approved the budget.
- Passive: The budget has been approved by the committee.

When we move to the Perfect tenses, we introduce the word "been." For the Present Perfect, "has approved" becomes "has been approved." This tense is very useful for reporting that a task is finished without specifying exactly when it happened.

Past Perfect Passive

6. Past Perfect

- Structure: had + been + Past Participle
- Active: The staff had finished the report before the deadline.
- Passive: The report had been finished before the deadline.

For the Past Perfect, we use "had been." This indicates an action that was completed before another action in the past. "The report had been finished" emphasizes the completion of the task before the deadline arrived.

Simple Future Passive

7. Simple Future

- Structure: will + be + Past Participle
- Active: The company will launch the new product next month.
- Passive: The new product will be launched next month.

Looking toward the future, the transformation is quite simple. We use "will be" plus the past participle. "The company will launch" becomes "The new product will be launched." This is very common in business announcements and project planning.

Future Perfect Passive

8. Future Perfect

- Structure: will have + been + Past Participle
- Active: They will have completed the building by December.
- Passive: The building will have been completed by December.

The Future Perfect passive is used for actions that will be finished by a certain time in the future. We use "will have been" plus the past participle. While it sounds complex, it is actually quite common when setting project milestones.

Activity 1: Transformation Drill

Activity: Sentence Transformation

Now, let's take a look at this exercise from our module. We need to transform these three sentences. For the first one, identify the tense: "checked" is past simple. So, what should the passive be? Notice the continuous and perfect aspects in the rest of the two sentences.

- Change these sentences into Passive Voice:
 1. The supervisor checked the quality.
 2. They are installing the new software.
 3. She has written the final draft.

Passive with Modals

Passive with Modal Verbs

We also use passive voice with modal verbs like 'can', 'must', and 'should'. The pattern is very consistent: Modal + 'be' + Past Participle. This is vital for writing safety manuals or instruction sets. Instead of saying "You must wear goggles," a safety sign will often say "Safety goggles must be worn."

It makes the rule feel more universal and formal.

- Modal (can, must, should, may) + be + Past Participle
- Active: You must wear safety goggles.
- Passive: Safety goggles must be worn.
- Active: We can solve the problem.
- Passive: The problem can be solved.

Transitive vs. Intransitive Verbs

Can All Verbs be Passive?

- Only Transitive Verbs (verbs that take an object) can be changed to passive voice.
- Transitive: He broke the glass. (The glass was broken.)
- Intransitive: The sun rose. (Cannot be passive!)
- Common Intransitive Verbs: happen, arrive, die, occur, sleep.

It is important to remember that not every verb can be made passive. Only "transitive" verbs—those that have a direct object receiving the action—can be transformed. For example, you cannot make "The sun rose" passive because there is no object. You will never see "The sun was risen by the sky." Verbs like 'happen', 'occur', or 'arrive' always stay in the active voice.

The 'By' Phrase

When to Include the Agent (The 'By' Phrase)

Students often ask: "Do I always have to include 'by someone'?" The answer is no. In fact, in technical writing, we usually omit it. You only include the "by" phrase if the person doing the action is surprising or essential to the meaning of the sentence. If the streets are cleaned, we don't care who specifically did it; we care that they are clean.

- Include: When the agent is important or unexpected.
- "The book was written by a local student."
- Omit: When the agent is unknown, unimportant, or obvious.
- "The streets are cleaned every night."

Activity 2: Identifying Passive Uses

Activity: Identifying Purpose: Let's analyze why these sentences are passive. Why is passive voice used in these sentences?

1. "Mistakes were made."
2. "The Pyramids were built thousands of years ago."
3. "The patient was rushed to the emergency room."

In "Mistakes were made," the speaker might be trying to avoid taking direct blame a common tactic in politics! In the case of the Pyramids, the focus is on the historical monument, and the specific names of the thousands of laborers are unknown. In the emergency room example, the urgency of the action is what matters most.

Direct and Indirect Objects

Sentences with Two Objects: Sometimes some verbs take two objects (Direct and Indirect).

- Active: The company gave the employees (IO) a bonus (DO).
- Passive 1: The employees were given a bonus.
- Passive 2: A bonus was given to the employees.

In the sentence “The company gave the employees a bonus,” the two objects are employees and bonus.

When forming the passive, either object can become the subject. “The employees were given a bonus” and “A bonus was given to the employees” are grammatically correct. The choice depends on which element you want to emphasize. Choose the one that highlights what you think is more important.

Application: Garment Production

Case Study: Garment Production: Using passive voice to describe a manufacturing process.

Let's apply this to a real-world scenario mentioned in your module: garment production. When we explain how a shirt is made, we don't focus on "Worker A" or "Worker B." We focus on the product. Over the next few slides, we'll see how the passive voice makes this description professional and clear.

Step 1: Fabric Selection

Step 2: Pattern Cutting

Step 3: Stitching/Assembly

Step 4: Quality Inspection

Process Step 1 & 2

- The Manufacturing Process (Part 1)
- Selection: High-quality cotton is selected for the base material.
- Cutting: The patterns are laid out and are cut using precision lasers.

First, the cotton is selected. Then, the patterns are laid out and cut.

Notice the simple present passive here it describes a standard, recurring process. Using "are cut" instead of "the workers cut" keeps our description focused on the precision of the manufacturing rather than the people.

Process Step 3 & 4: The Manufacturing Process (Part 2)

- Assembly: The various pieces are stitched together by industrial sewing machines.
- Finishing: Finally, the buttons are attached and the garment is pressed.

As we continue,

The pieces are stitched together by industrial sewing machines. Finally, buttons are attached and the garment is pressed.

Here, we added "by" because the technology used is important. Remember that all of these sentences use the passive voice to create a cohesive, objective flow of information.

Process Step 5: Quality Control

Quality Assurance

- Every single item is inspected for defects before packaging.
- If a flaw is found, the item is sent back for rework.

Quality control is another perfect place for the passive voice. "The item is inspected." "If a flaw is found." "The item is sent back." These sentences describe the rules and procedures of the factory. It sounds much more official than saying "We check the items and if we find a flaw, we send it back."

Activity 3: Describing Processes

- Activity: Process Description
- Think about your own specialization.
- If you are in IT: How is a software update deployed?
- If you are in Accounting: How is a tax return filed?

Write three sentences in the passive voice to describe the steps of a process in your field (e.g., IT, Engineering, Accounting). Remember Passive Voice Structure: Object (becomes Subject) + “be” verb + Past Participle (+ by agent)

Passive in News Reporting and Journalism

Another major area for the passive voice is news reporting. Journalists often use it when they don't have all the facts yet, or when they want to remain neutral.

- Passive voice is used to report events neutrally or when the perpetrator is unknown.
- "A local bank was robbed this morning."
- "A bank was robbed" focuses on the crime itself. This is a very common structure in headlines.
- "Protestors were dispersed by the police."

Case Study: Reporting an Accident

Consider this accident report. In the active voice, the car is the focus. In the passive voice, the pedestrian becomes the focus. Depending on the story, the journalist wants to tell, they might choose the passive voice to evoke more sympathy for the person who was hit.

- Active: A speeding car hit a pedestrian.
- Passive: A pedestrian was hit by a speeding car.
- Note: The passive version puts the focus on the victim/survivor.

Activity 4: News Transformation

- Activity: Headlines
- Convert these active headlines to passive:
 1. "The Prime Minister opened the new hospital."
 2. "Scientists found a cure for the virus."
 3. "Heavy rain flooded the city center."

Passive in Academic Writing

Now we come to the most important application for your university career: academic writing. In your lab reports, especially the "Materials and Methods" section, the passive voice is standard. It removes the personal "I" and emphasizes that anyone following these steps would get the same result. It is the hallmark of professional scientific communication.

- Academic and Scientific Writing
- The passive voice is a standard in the 'Materials and Methods' section of lab reports.
- It removes the 'I' or 'We'.
- It emphasizes the repeatability of the experiment.
- It maintains a formal, professional tone.

The Lab Report: Methodology...cont'd

Compare these two sets of sentences. The active versions sound like a story about what “you” did. The passive versions sound like a scientific fact. In your future lab reports, always aim for the passive versions. It shows that you understand how to communicate as a professional scientist or engineer.

- Writing a Methodology Section
- Active (Avoid): I heated the solution to 100°C.
- Passive (Use): The solution was heated to 100°C.
- Active (Avoid): We observed the reaction for 10 minutes.
- Passive (Use): The reaction was observed for 10 minutes.

Activity 5: Lab Report

Let's try a full paragraph transformation. This sounds very informal right now.

Rewrite this paragraph using passive voice to professionalize the Report

"I took 50ml of water. I added 5g of salt. Then, I stirred the mixture until the salt dissolved."

"50ml of water was taken. 5g of salt was added. Then, the mixture was stirred until the salt was dissolve"

Notice how much more authoritative and scientific that sounds.

Common Mistakes

Common Pitfall:

Omitting 'To Be': A very common mistake is forgetting the 'be' verb. If you say:

Error: "The report finished yesterday." (Incorrect passive) it sounds like the report itself did the finishing!

- Correction: "The report was finished yesterday." (Correct passive)

To make it passive, you must include "was" or "is." Never forget the "be" verb: it is the bridge that makes the sentence passive. Tip: Without the 'be' verb, it's not passive!

Common Mistakes... Cont'd

Another mistake is using the base form of the verb instead of the past participle.

Now let's consider these Common Pitfalls: Wrong Past Participle

- Error: "The house was build in 1990."
- Correction: "The house was built in 1990."

We don't say "was build," we say "was built." This requires you to have a good grasp of irregular verbs.

Always double-check your V3 forms!

- Note: Always use the V3 (Past Participle) form.

Activity 6: Error Correction

Now, let's look at these three sentences. They all have mistakes.

Please spot the mistakes in these passive sentences:

1. The car is repair by the mechanic.
2. The letters were being send yesterday.
3. The results have been show to the manager.

Advanced Passive: Gerunds

As we move toward more advanced structures, we can even make gerunds passive. Instead of saying "I don't like people laughing at me," one can say "I don't like being laughed at." This is a very natural and sophisticated way to speak English.

Passive Gerunds Structure:

- being + Past Participle
- Active: I hate people staring at me.
- Passive: I hate being stared at.

Advanced Passive: Infinitives

Similarly, infinitives, the "to" form of the verb can be made passive. "The work is expected to be finished." This structure is very common in formal reports and business expectations. It sounds much more professional than the active version.

Passive Infinitives Structure: to be + Past Participle

- **Active:** The manager expects us to finish the work.
- **Passive:** The work is expected to be finished.

Impersonal Passive

In academic and journalistic writing, we often use the "Impersonal Passive." This allows us to report general beliefs or rumors without naming a specific source. "It is said that..." or "It is believed to be..." are very useful phrases for introducing ideas in an essay.

The Impersonal Passive

- Used with verbs like say, believe, think, claim.
- Active: People say that he is a genius.
- Passive: It is said that he is a genius.
- Passive: He is said to be a genius.

Activity: Comprehensive Review

The Passive Challenge

Let's put everything together with this final challenge. Imagine you are writing a summary for a technical journal. How would you rewrite these three sentences?

Rewrite this short technical summary in the passive voice. Remember to use the correct tenses:

"We designed the new engine to save fuel. We tested it for six months. We finally achieved a 20% improvement."

When to AVOID Passive Voice

While we've spent today praising the passive voice, don't overdo it. If every single sentence you write is passive, your reader will get bored or confused. Passive voice is longer and less direct.

- A Word of Caution: Don't use passive voice for everything!; It can be wordy; it can be less engaging than active voice; it can sometimes lead to vague writing.

Rule of thumb: Use active for stories and engagement; use passive for facts and processes. Use active voice for storytelling and engaging your audience, and save the passive for the technical, objective parts of your work.

Summary of Transformations

Let's recap our "cheat sheet." For any tense, just remember these key words. "Is/Are" for present, "Was /Were" for past, "Being" for continuous, "Been" for perfect, and "Will be" for future. If you master these five variations, you can handle almost any passive transformation in English.

As a Quick Tense Summary, please consider the following:

- Present: is/are + V3
- Past: was/were + V3
- Continuous: being + V3
- Perfect: been + V3
- Future: will be + V3

Discussion & Questions

We've covered a lot of ground today, from the basics of S-V-O to complex lab report paragraphs. I want to open the floor to you now. Is there a specific tense that still feels a bit confusing? Or a situation where you aren't sure if you should use the active or passive voice? Please, feel free to ask.

- Are there any tenses that still feel confusing?
- When are you unsure about using the passive voice?

Closing

Thank you all for your attention today. Remember, grammar isn't just a set of rules; it's a tool for clear and professional communication. By mastering the passive voice, you are one step closer to being a proficient communicator in the global professional world. Have a great time, and I'll see you in the next session!

- For any question, please reach out to me:
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