

Passive: Simple Tenses

Grammar Lesson, Examples & 30 Practice Questions

Passive: Simple Tenses

In English, we usually say **who does something**. But sometimes we want to talk about **what happens to something or someone** — or we do not know who did the action. This is when we use the **passive voice**.

Look at these two sentences:

Active: The chef cooks the meal.

Passive: The meal is cooked by the chef.

In the active sentence, the chef (the person doing the action) comes first. In the passive sentence, the meal (the thing receiving the action) comes first. The chef is now less important.

In this lesson, we will learn how to make the passive in two simple tenses: the **Present Simple** and the **Past Simple**. These are called the **passive simple tenses**.

What Is the Passive Voice?

Let us start with a small story:

Maria works in a factory. Every day, cars are built in the factory. Yesterday, 50 cars were finished. Maria does not know who painted some of the cars.

Notice: *cars are built* and *cars were finished*. We are talking about what happens **to the cars**, not about who is doing the work. This is the passive voice.

We use the passive voice when:

- The person doing the action is **not known**.
- The person doing the action is **not important**.
- We want to focus on **what happened**, not on who did it.

Rule Breakdown: How to Form the Passive

To make a passive sentence, we need two things:

1. The correct form of the verb **"to be"**
2. The **past participle** of the main verb

What Is a Past Participle?

A **past participle** is a form of a verb. For regular verbs, it looks the same as the past simple — you add **-ed** to the base verb.

- cook → cooked
- clean → cleaned
- fix → fixed
- open → opened

For irregular verbs, the past participle is a special form you need to learn:

- write → written
- make → made
- eat → eaten
- see → seen
- build → built
- break → broken
- steal → stolen
- send → sent

Passive: Present Simple

We use the **Present Simple Passive** to talk about things that happen regularly or are generally true — but we focus on the thing, not the person doing it.

Formula

Subject + am / is / are + past participle

Examples

- The windows **are cleaned** every week.
- English **is spoken** in many countries.
- The letters **are delivered** in the morning.
- The food **is cooked** in a big kitchen.
- I **am paid** on Fridays.

Present Simple Passive: Forms of "To Be"

Subject	Form of "to be"	Example
I	am	I am invited to the party.
He / She / It	is	The car is washed every day.
We / You / They	are	The shops are closed on Sunday.

Negative Form: Present Simple Passive

To make a negative sentence, add **not** after *am / is / are*.

Subject + am / is / are + not + past participle

- The windows **are not cleaned** every day.
- The food **is not cooked** here.
- I **am not invited** to the meeting.

Question Form: Present Simple Passive

To make a question, put *am / is / are* **before the subject**.

Am / Is / Are + subject + past participle?

- **Is** the food cooked here?
- **Are** the letters delivered in the morning?
- **Am** I included in the list?

Passive: Past Simple

We use the **Past Simple Passive** to talk about things that happened in the past — but we focus on what happened to something or someone, not on who did it.

Formula

Subject + was / were + past participle

Examples

- The window **was broken** last night.
- The emails **were sent** yesterday.
- A new school **was built** in our town.
- The children **were taken** to the park.
- My phone **was stolen** on the bus.

Past Simple Passive: Forms of "To Be"

Subject	Form of "to be"	Example
I / He / She / It	was	The letter was written yesterday.
We / You / They	were	The boxes were opened this morning.

Negative Form: Past Simple Passive

To make a negative sentence, add **not** after *was / were*.

Subject + was / were + not + past participle

- The window **was not cleaned** last week.
- The emails **were not sent** on time.
- The door **was not locked**.

Question Form: Past Simple Passive

To make a question, put *was / were* **before the subject**.

Was / Were + subject + past participle?

- **Was** the window broken?
- **Were** the emails sent?
- **Was** the car repaired?

Full Comparison Table: Active vs Passive

Tense	Active Sentence	Passive Sentence
Present Simple	Someone cleans the office.	The office is cleaned.
Present Simple	They sell the tickets online.	The tickets are sold online.
Present Simple	She speaks French.	French is spoken (by her).
Past Simple	Someone built this house in 1990.	This house was built in 1990.
Past Simple	They arrested the man.	The man was arrested.
Past Simple	Someone stole my bag.	My bag was stolen.

Using "By" in Passive Sentences

Sometimes we want to say **who** did the action. We use the word **"by"** to do this.

Passive sentence + by + the person / thing that did the action

- The window was broken **by Tom**.
- The meal is cooked **by the chef**.
- The book was written **by a famous author**.
- English is spoken **by millions of people**.

But remember — we often do NOT use "by" if the person is unknown or not important:

- My phone was stolen. (*We do not know who did it.*)
- The rubbish is collected on Tuesdays. (*It is not important who collects it.*)

Important Differences and Special Cases

Was or Were?

A very common mistake is using *was* and *were* with the wrong subject. Remember:

- Use **was** with: I, he, she, it (singular)
- Use **were** with: we, you, they (plural)

Think about the noun in your sentence. Is it **one thing** or **more than one thing**?

- The **car** was repaired. (*one car = was*)
- The **cars** were repaired. (*more than one car = were*)

Is or Are?

The same rule applies to the present simple passive:

- Use **is** with he, she, it — and singular nouns.
- Use **are** with we, you, they — and plural nouns.
- The **shop** is closed. (*one shop = is*)
- The **shops** are closed. (*more than one shop = are*)

Active or Passive? How to Choose

Use Active when...	Use Passive when...
You know who does the action	You do not know who does the action
The person doing it is important	The person doing it is not important
The sentence feels personal	You want to focus on the thing or result

Common Mistakes

- ✗ The car is fix every year.
- ✓ **The car is fixed every year.** (Use the past participle: fixed, not fix.)
- ✗ The windows was cleaned yesterday.
- ✓ **The windows were cleaned yesterday.** (Windows is plural — use were, not was.)
- ✗ The letter were sent last Monday.
- ✓ **The letter was sent last Monday.** (Letter is singular — use was, not were.)
- ✗ My bag was steal on the bus.
- ✓ **My bag was stolen on the bus.** (Use the past participle: stolen, not steal.)
- ✗ English are spoken in many countries.
- ✓ **English is spoken in many countries.** (English is singular — use is, not are.)
- ✗ The food is cooked by they.
- ✓ **The food is cooked by them.** (After "by", use object pronouns: them, him, her — not subject pronouns.)
- ✗ Was the emails sent?
- ✓ **Were the emails sent?** (Emails is plural — use were, not was.)

Contractions in the Passive

In everyday spoken English and informal writing, we often shorten *is not* and *are not* and *was not* and *were not*.

Full Form	Contraction	Example
is not	isn't	The shop isn't closed today.
are not	aren't	The tickets aren't sold here.
was not	wasn't	The window wasn't broken by me.
were not	weren't	The emails weren't sent yesterday.

In formal writing, always use the full forms: *is not*, *are not*, *was not*, *were not*.

Passive Simple Tenses: Quick Summary

Here is everything you need to remember about the **passive simple tenses**:

- Use the passive to focus on **what happens** to something, not who does it.
- The passive is made with: **to be + past participle**.
- For **Present Simple Passive**, use *am / is / are* + past participle.
- For **Past Simple Passive**, use *was / were* + past participle.
- Use **is / was** with singular nouns (one thing).
- Use **are / were** with plural nouns (more than one thing).
- To say who did the action, add **"by"** at the end.
- Always use the **past participle** — not the base verb or past simple form.

Tense	Formula	Example
Present Simple Passive	am / is / are + past participle	The office is cleaned every day.
Past Simple Passive	was / were + past participle	The window was broken last night.

Now practise **passive simple tenses** in the exercises below.

Passive: Simple Tenses – Practice Test

A2 | 30 Questions: Multiple Choice, Fill-in-the-Gap & Fill-in-the-Blank

Part 1: Multiple Choice (Questions 1–10)

1 The windows ____ cleaned every week.

- A** is
- B** are
- C** were
- D** was

2 This cake ____ made by my grandmother yesterday.

- A** is
- B** are
- C** was
- D** were

3 The letters ____ sent yesterday.

- A** is
- B** was
- C** are
- D** were

4 English ____ spoken in many countries.

- A** is
- B** are
- C** was
- D** were

5 The car ____ repaired last Monday.

- A** is
- B** are
- C** were
- D** was

6 The books ____ not returned to the library.

- A** was
- B** is
- C** were
- D** are

7 Rice ____ grown in many Asian countries.

- A** are
- B** were
- C** is
- D** be

8 The children ____ not allowed to enter the room.

- A** was
- B** is
- C** were
- D** am

9 The phone ____ stolen at the bus station.

- A** were
- B** are
- C** was
- D** is

10 These shoes ____ made in Italy.

- A** is
- B** was
- C** are
- D** be

Part 2: Fill in the Gap (Questions 11–20)

11 This letter ____ every day by the postman.

- A** is delivered
- B** delivers
- C** delivered

12 The windows ____ yesterday by the cleaner.

- A** were cleaned
- B** are cleaned
- C** was cleaned

13 English ____ in many countries around the world.

- A** is spoken
- B** was spoken
- C** spoke

14 The cake ____ by my mother last night.

- A** was made
- B** is made
- C** were made

15 These cars ____ in Japan every year.

- A** are produced
- B** is produced
- C** produced

16 The homework ____ not finished by the students yesterday.

- A** was
- B** is
- C** were

17 Many trees ____ in the storm last week.

- A** were damaged
- B** are damaged
- C** was damaged

18 Dinner ____ at seven o'clock every evening.

- A** is served
- B** was served
- C** are served

19 The letters ____ sent to the wrong address last month.

- A** were
- B** are
- C** was

20 This song ____ by millions of people every day.

- A** is heard
- B** heard
- C** were heard

Part 3: Fill in the Blank (Questions 21–30)

21 This book _____ by a famous author.

22 The windows _____ by the workers yesterday.

23 This car _____ in Japan in 2010.

24 English _____ in many countries around the world.

25 The letters _____ every Monday by the office.

26 The cake _____ by the children at the party.

27 My phone _____ at the shop last week.

28 These shoes _____ in Italy.

29 The new school _____ five years ago.

30 Rice _____ every day by many people in Asia.

Answer Key & Explanations

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Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. **B** Correct Answer: are ✓ Explanation: We use are in the simple present passive with plural nouns like windows. The structure is subject + are + past participle.
2. **C** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was in the simple past passive with singular nouns like cake. The structure is subject + was + past participle.
3. **D** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: We use were in the simple past passive with plural nouns like letters. The structure is subject + were + past participle.
4. **A** Correct Answer: is ✓ Explanation: We use is in the simple present passive with singular nouns like English. The structure is subject + is + past participle.
5. **D** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was in the simple past passive because car is singular and the action happened in the past (last Monday).
6. **C** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: The sentence uses simple past passive because of the context. Books is plural, so we use were. The structure is subject + were + not + past participle.
7. **C** Correct Answer: is ✓ Explanation: We use is in the simple present passive with singular nouns like rice. The structure is subject + is + past participle.
8. **C** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: Children is a plural noun, so we use were in the simple past passive. The structure is subject + were + not + past participle.
9. **C** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: Phone is singular, so we use was in the simple past passive. The verb stolen is the past participle of steal.
10. **C** Correct Answer: are ✓ Explanation: We use are in the simple present passive with plural nouns like shoes. The structure is subject + are + past participle.

Part 2: Fill in the Gap

11. **A** Correct Answer: is delivered ✓ Explanation: We use is + past participle for the simple present passive with a singular subject. This letter is delivered every day.
12. **A** Correct Answer: were cleaned ✓ Explanation: Windows is plural, so we use were + past participle for the simple past passive. The windows were cleaned yesterday.
13. **A** Correct Answer: is spoken ✓ Explanation: We use is + past participle for facts in the simple present passive. English is spoken in many countries.

14. **A** Correct Answer: was made ✓ Explanation: The cake is singular and the action happened in the past, so we use was + past participle. The cake was made last night.
15. **A** Correct Answer: are produced ✓ Explanation: These cars is plural, so we use are + past participle for the simple present passive. These cars are produced in Japan.
16. **A** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: The homework is singular and refers to the past, so we use was for the simple past passive. The homework was not finished yesterday.
17. **A** Correct Answer: were damaged ✓ Explanation: Many trees is plural and the event is in the past, so we use were + past participle. Many trees were damaged in the storm.
18. **A** Correct Answer: is served ✓ Explanation: Dinner is singular and the sentence describes a routine, so we use is + past participle for the simple present passive. Dinner is served at seven o'clock.
19. **A** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: The letters is plural and the action happened in the past, so we use were for the simple past passive. The letters were sent to the wrong address.
20. **A** Correct Answer: is heard ✓ Explanation: This song is singular and the sentence is about a current fact, so we use is + past participle for the simple present passive. This song is heard by millions of people.

Part 3: Fill in the Blank

21. **is written|is written** Correct Answer: is written ✓ Explanation: We use is + past participle for the simple present passive with a singular subject. The book is written by someone.
22. **were cleaned** Correct Answer: were cleaned ✓ Explanation: We use were + past participle for the simple past passive with a plural subject. The windows were cleaned yesterday.
23. **was made** Correct Answer: was made ✓ Explanation: We use was + past participle for the simple past passive with a singular subject. The car was made in Japan.
24. **is spoken** Correct Answer: is spoken ✓ Explanation: We use is + past participle for the simple present passive when talking about general facts. English is spoken everywhere.
25. **are sent** Correct Answer: are sent ✓ Explanation: We use are + past participle for the simple present passive with a plural subject. The letters are sent on Mondays.
26. **was eaten** Correct Answer: was eaten ✓ Explanation: We use was + past participle for the simple past passive with a singular subject. The cake was eaten at the party.
27. **was repaired** Correct Answer: was repaired ✓ Explanation: We use was + past participle for the simple past passive. My phone was repaired last week tells us someone fixed it in the past.

28. **are made** Correct Answer: are made ✓ Explanation: We use are + past participle for the simple present passive with a plural subject. These shoes are made in Italy is a general fact.
29. **was built** Correct Answer: was built ✓ Explanation: We use was + past participle for the simple past passive. The school was built means someone built it in the past.
30. **is eaten** Correct Answer: is eaten ✓ Explanation: We use is + past participle for the simple present passive to talk about habits or general facts. Rice is eaten every day.

Score Guide

- 27–30 Correct** Excellent! You have mastered this topic.
- 23–26 Correct** Very good! Review the rules you missed.
- 18–22 Correct** Good start. Re-read the lesson and examples.
- 0–17 Correct** Study the lesson again before retaking the test.