

Passive: Summary

Grammar Lesson, Examples & 30 Practice Questions

Passive: Summary

In English, we use the **passive voice** to focus on what happens to something or someone, rather than on who does the action. The passive is used across many different tenses and structures, and at B2 level, it is important to understand how the passive works in all of them.

Compare these two sentences:

Active: The chef prepares the meal every day.

Passive: The meal is prepared every day.

In the passive sentence, we focus on *the meal*, not on the chef. This lesson brings together all the key passive structures in one place, so you can see how they work, compare them, and avoid common mistakes.

How to Form the Passive

The passive is always formed with the correct form of the verb **to be** + the **past participle** of the main verb.

Formula: subject + correct form of "be" + past participle (+ by + agent)

The **agent** is the person or thing doing the action. We use **by** to introduce the agent, but we only mention the agent when it is important or interesting.

Example: The letter was written by the president. (The agent — the president — is important here.)

Example: The windows were cleaned yesterday. (We do not need to say who cleaned them.)

Passive Forms Across All Tenses

Below is a complete summary of how the passive is formed in each major tense and structure. Study the pattern carefully in each case.

Present Simple Passive

Form: am / is / are + past participle

Coffee is grown in Brazil.

These cars are made in Germany.

I am paid at the end of the month.

Present Continuous Passive

Form: am / is / are + being + past participle

The road is being repaired at the moment.

New staff are being trained this week.

Past Simple Passive

Form: was / were + past participle

The painting was stolen last night.

The invitations were sent last week.

Past Continuous Passive

Form: was / were + being + past participle

The building was being renovated when the fire started.

The documents were being checked at that time.

Present Perfect Passive

Form: has / have + been + past participle

The report has been submitted.

Several mistakes have been found.

Past Perfect Passive

Form: had + been + past participle

The tickets had already been booked before she arrived.

The system had been updated the previous day.

Future Simple Passive

Form: will + be + past participle

The results will be announced tomorrow.

All applications will be reviewed carefully.

Future Perfect Passive

Form: will + have + been + past participle

The project will have been completed by Friday.

The reports will have been sent before the meeting begins.

Conditional (Would) Passive

Form: would + be + past participle

The event would be cancelled if it rained.

More jobs would be created by the new policy.

Modal Passive (can, could, must, should, might, may, etc.)

Form: modal verb + be + past participle

This medicine must be kept in the fridge.
The form should be completed in black ink.
The package might be delivered tomorrow.
The rules can be changed at any time.

Passive: Complete Summary Table

Tense / Structure	Passive Form	Example
Present Simple	am / is / are + past participle	The news is reported every hour.
Present Continuous	am / is / are + being + past participle	The bridge is being built now.
Past Simple	was / were + past participle	The car was repaired yesterday.
Past Continuous	was / were + being + past participle	The food was being prepared at noon.
Present Perfect	has / have + been + past participle	The emails have been sent .
Past Perfect	had + been + past participle	The form had been signed already.
Future Simple	will + be + past participle	The winner will be announced soon.
Future Perfect	will + have + been + past participle	The work will have been finished by Monday.
Conditional (would)	would + be + past participle	More trees would be planted with funding.
Modal Passive	modal + be + past participle	The gate must be locked at night.

Passive with "Get"

In informal spoken English, we sometimes use **get** instead of **be** to form the passive. This is especially common when something happens suddenly, accidentally, or unexpectedly.

Form: get + past participle

He got fined for parking illegally.
She got promoted last month.
My phone got stolen on the bus.
They got caught in the rain.

Note: The **get passive** is more informal. In formal writing, always use **be + past participle**.

Passive Reporting Structures

We often use passive reporting structures in news reports, academic writing, and formal contexts. These allow us to report information without saying exactly who said or believed it.

Common patterns:

It + passive reporting verb + that + clause

It is believed that the company will close soon.

It was reported that three people were injured.

It is said that he was a brilliant scientist.

Subject + passive reporting verb + to + infinitive

The suspect is believed to be in the country.

The economy is expected to grow next year.

He is known to have worked there for years.

Common reporting verbs used in these structures include: **say, believe, think, report, expect, know, consider, claim, allege, understand.**

When to Use the Passive

Knowing *when* to use the passive is just as important as knowing how to form it. Use the passive in the following situations:

- When the **agent (doer) is unknown**: *My bag was taken from the office.*
- When the **agent is unimportant or obvious**: *The rubbish is collected on Tuesdays.*
- When you want to **focus on the action or the result**, not the doer: *The contract has been signed.*
- In **formal or academic writing** to sound impersonal: *The data were analysed using a computer program.*
- In **news reports** and **official announcements**: *Three people have been arrested in connection with the robbery.*
- To **avoid blame or responsibility**: *Mistakes were made.*

Passive in Questions and Negatives

Forming questions and negatives in the passive follows the same rules as with the verb **to be** in each tense.

Questions

Is the parcel being delivered today?

Was the report submitted on time?

Have the results been published yet?

Will the meeting be recorded?

When was the building constructed?

Negatives

The letter wasn't sent yesterday.

The results haven't been announced yet.

The area shouldn't be accessed without permission.

The form won't be processed without a signature.

Important Differences and Special Cases

Active vs Passive: Which to Choose?

English speakers use the active voice most of the time in everyday conversation. Use the passive intentionally — when it serves a clear purpose (see the list above). Overusing the passive can make writing feel awkward or unnecessarily complicated.

Active (natural): *The police arrested the suspect.*

Passive (also fine here): *The suspect was arrested.* (focus on the suspect)

Transitive Verbs Only

Only **transitive verbs** (verbs that take an object) can be made passive. Intransitive verbs (verbs with no object) cannot.

✓ *The book was written by a local author.* (write = transitive)

✗ *The accident was happened at midnight.* (happen = intransitive — cannot be passive)

Two-Object Verbs in the Passive

Some verbs, such as **give, send, offer, show, tell, teach, pay**, can take two objects. Either object can become the subject of the passive sentence.

Active: *The teacher gave the students a test.*

Passive (indirect object as subject): *The students were given a test.*

Passive (direct object as subject): *A test was given to the students.*

Both passive versions are correct. The first version (indirect object as subject) is more common in British English.

The Agent: When to Include "By"

Only include the **by + agent** phrase when the agent is important, surprising, or adds useful information. In most passive sentences, the agent is left out.

✓ Useful: *The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo da Vinci.* (The agent is famous and important.)

✗ Unnecessary: *The window was broken by someone.* → Better: *The window was broken.*

Common Mistakes

✗ *The car was repairing yesterday.*

✓ **Use the past participle, not the -ing form.** The car was repaired yesterday.

✗ *The report has written by the manager.*

✓ **Always include "been" in perfect passive structures.** The report has been written by the manager.

✗ *The accident was happened last night.*

✓ **Intransitive verbs cannot be made passive.** The accident happened last night.

✗ *She was given to a scholarship.*

✓ **Do not add "to" when the indirect object becomes the subject.** She was given a scholarship.

✗ *The letters were sended to all members.*

✓ **Use the correct past participle, not a regular form of an irregular verb.** The letters were sent to all

members.

✗ *The building is been renovated.*

✓ **In the present continuous passive, use "is being", not "is been".** The building is being renovated.

✗ *It was said that he is a spy.* (when referring to the same time period)

✓ **Match the tense in the that-clause to the reporting verb.** It was said that he was a spy.

Passive: Quick Summary

Here are the key points to remember about the passive in English:

- The passive is formed with the correct form of **be + past participle**.
- The passive exists in **all major tenses** and with **modal verbs**.
- Use the passive when the **agent is unknown, unimportant, or obvious**.
- Use **by + agent** only when the agent is important or relevant.
- The **get passive** is informal: *He got promoted.*
- Use **passive reporting structures** in formal, academic, and news contexts.
- Only **transitive verbs** can be made passive.
- With two-object verbs, either object can become the subject of the passive sentence.
- Always use the **past participle** (not the -ing form) in passive constructions.

Now practise the **passive: summary** in the exercises below.

Passive: Summary – Practice Test

B2 | 30 Questions: Multiple Choice, Fill-in-the-Gap & Fill-in-the-Blank

Part 1: Multiple Choice (Questions 1–10)

1 Which sentence is correctly written in the passive voice?

- A** The chef is cooking the meal.
- B** The meal is being cooked by the chef.
- C** The meal cooks by the chef.
- D** The chef has been cooked the meal.

2 The report ____ by the manager before the deadline yesterday.

- A** was submitted
- B** is submitted
- C** has been submitted
- D** submits

3 By the time the inspectors arrived, all the documents ____ already.

- A** destroyed
- B** were destroyed
- C** had been destroyed
- D** have been destroyed

4 It is believed that the painting ____ in the 17th century.

- A** created
- B** was created
- C** has created
- D** is creating

5 The new bridge ____ by the end of next year.

- A** will complete
- B** will have been completed
- C** is completed
- D** was being completed

6 The winner's name ____ to all participants since last Monday.

- A** was revealed
- B** is revealed
- C** has been revealed
- D** had been revealed

7 Passengers are requested ____ their boarding passes ready.

- A** keeping
- B** to keep
- C** kept
- D** keep

8 The suspect ____ for questioning when new evidence emerged.

- A** was being held
- B** has been held
- C** is held
- D** will be held

9 Which sentence correctly uses the passive voice with a modal verb?

- A** This form must fill in by the applicant.
- B** This form must be filling in by the applicant.
- C** This form must be filled in by the applicant.
- D** This form must filled in by the applicant.

10 The new policy ____ out gradually over the next few months.

- A** is going to phase
- B** is going to be phased
- C** will phase
- D** has been phasing

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

11 The new bridge ____ by the government last year.

- A** was built
- B** has been built
- C** is built

12 The report ____ to the board of directors by Friday.

- A** must be submitted
- B** must submit
- C** must be submitting

13 The stolen paintings ____ by the police so far.

- A** have not been recovered
- B** were not recovered
- C** had not been recovered

14 It is believed that the suspect ____ the country before the arrest warrant was issued.

- A** had left
- B** has left
- C** was left

15 The new policy ____ into effect at the start of next month.

- A** will be put
- B** will put
- C** is being put

16 The children ____ to stay indoors during the storm.

- A** were told
- B** were telling
- C** have told

17 The concert ____ due to the heavy rain.

- A** was called off
- B** has called off
- C** called off

18 Scientists say that a cure for the disease ____ within the next decade.

- A** is expected to be found
- B** is expected to find
- C** expects to be found

19 The road works ____ when we drove past the construction site.

- A** were still being carried out
- B** were still carried out
- C** had still been carried out

20 All passengers are requested ____ their boarding passes ready before reaching the gate.

- A** to have
- B** having
- C** to be having

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

21 The new library _____ by a famous architect in 2005.

22 The annual report _____ by the finance team at the moment.

23 By the time the guests arrived, all the food _____ .

24 You should _____ about the changes to the schedule before the meeting.

25 The missing documents _____ by the police after a long search.

26 It is believed _____ the ancient city was destroyed by an earthquake.

27 The project will _____ by the end of the year.

28 The suspect is reported _____ near the crime scene last night.

29 The CEO admitted that mistakes _____ during the financial crisis.

30 A new vaccine _____ within the next six months.

Answer Key & Explanations

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Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. **B** Correct Answer: The meal is being cooked by the chef. ✓ Explanation: The present continuous passive is formed with is/are + being + past participle. The meal is being cooked correctly moves the object to the subject position and uses by to indicate the agent.
2. **A** Correct Answer: was submitted ✓ Explanation: The time reference yesterday signals the simple past. The past simple passive is formed with was/were + past participle, giving us was submitted.
3. **C** Correct Answer: had been destroyed ✓ Explanation: The phrase by the time combined with a past reference requires the past perfect passive, formed with had been + past participle. This shows the destruction happened before the inspectors arrived.
4. **B** Correct Answer: was created ✓ Explanation: When reporting beliefs about past events, English uses It is believed that + past simple passive. The structure was created correctly uses was + past participle to describe a completed past action.
5. **B** Correct Answer: will have been completed ✓ Explanation: The phrase by the end of next year signals the future perfect passive, formed with will have been + past participle. This indicates the action will be finished before a future point in time.
6. **C** Correct Answer: has been revealed ✓ Explanation: The phrase since last Monday indicates a period starting in the past and continuing to now, requiring the present perfect passive, formed with has/have been + past participle.
7. **B** Correct Answer: to keep ✓ Explanation: After a passive verb such as are requested, are asked, or are told, we use the full infinitive (to + base verb). Therefore, to keep is the correct form here.
8. **A** Correct Answer: was being held ✓ Explanation: The sentence describes an action in progress in the past that was interrupted. The past continuous passive (was/were + being + past participle) expresses this interrupted ongoing action, as in was being held.
9. **C** Correct Answer: This form must be filled in by the applicant. ✓ Explanation: The modal passive is formed with modal verb + be + past participle. Must be filled in correctly follows this pattern. Modal verbs like must, should, can, might are always followed by the bare infinitive be, not been or being.
10. **B** Correct Answer: is going to be phased ✓ Explanation: To express a planned future action in the passive voice, we use is/are going to be + past participle. Is going to be phased correctly indicates a planned future passive action, with out completing the phrasal verb phase out.

Part 2: Fill in the Gap

11. **A** Correct Answer: was built ✓ Explanation: The time expression last year signals the simple past passive, which is formed with was/were + past participle. The new bridge was built by the government last year.
12. **A** Correct Answer: must be submitted ✓ Explanation: To form a modal passive, we use modal + be + past participle. The report must be submitted means someone is required to submit it. Must submit would be active voice.
13. **A** Correct Answer: have not been recovered ✓ Explanation: The phrase so far indicates a present perfect passive: have/has + been + past participle. The paintings have not been recovered so far.
14. **A** Correct Answer: had left ✓ Explanation: In an impersonal passive structure with It is believed that..., the subordinate clause uses the past perfect to show an action that happened before another past event. The suspect had left the country before the warrant was issued.
15. **A** Correct Answer: will be put ✓ Explanation: For a future passive, we use will + be + past participle. Will put is active voice, and is being put refers to something happening now. The policy will be put into effect next month.
16. **A** Correct Answer: were told ✓ Explanation: This is a simple past passive with a verb that takes an indirect object (tell). We use were + past participle. Were telling is active past continuous, and have told is active present perfect.
17. **A** Correct Answer: was called off ✓ Explanation: Call off is a phrasal verb that can be used in the passive. The simple past passive form is was called off. Has called off is active voice and grammatically incorrect here.
18. **A** Correct Answer: is expected to be found ✓ Explanation: This is a passive infinitive construction: is/are expected + to be + past participle. Is expected to find is active and changes the meaning. Expects to be found is grammatically incorrect in this context.
19. **A** Correct Answer: were still being carried out ✓ Explanation: This is a past continuous passive: was/were + being + past participle, used for an action in progress at a specific past moment. Were still being carried out shows the work was ongoing when they drove past.
20. **A** Correct Answer: to have ✓ Explanation: After a passive verb + requested, we use a to-infinitive. The structure is are requested + to + base verb. Having and to be having do not follow this passive construction correctly.

Part 3: Fill in the Blank

21. **was built** Correct Answer: was built ✓ Explanation: We use the past simple passive (was/were + past participle) for completed actions in the past. The subject library is singular, so we use was + built.

22. **is being prepared** Correct Answer: is being prepared ✓ Explanation: We use the present continuous passive (is/are + being + past participle) for actions happening right now. The report is singular, so we use is being prepared.
23. **had been eaten** Correct Answer: had been eaten ✓ Explanation: We use the past perfect passive (had + been + past participle) for an action completed before another past event. Had been eaten shows the food was gone before the guests arrived.
24. **be informed** Correct Answer: be informed ✓ Explanation: After modal verbs (e.g., should, must, can), the passive is formed with be + past participle. Should be informed is the correct structure here.
25. **have been found** Correct Answer: have been found ✓ Explanation: We use the present perfect passive (have/has + been + past participle) when the result of a past action is relevant now. Documents is plural, so we use have been found.
26. **that** Correct Answer: that ✓ Explanation: In formal passive reporting structures, we use It is believed / said / reported + that + clause. This structure is commonly used to report opinions or facts without naming the source.
27. **have been completed** Correct Answer: have been completed ✓ Explanation: We use the future perfect passive (will + have + been + past participle) for actions that will be finished before a specific future point. Will have been completed is the correct form.
28. **to have been seen** Correct Answer: to have been seen ✓ Explanation: In passive reporting structures with subject + is/are + reported/believed/said, we use to + have + been + past participle to refer to a past event. To have been seen indicates this happened before the reporting.
29. **had been made** Correct Answer: had been made ✓ Explanation: We use the past perfect passive (had + been + past participle) here because the mistakes occurred before the CEO's admission. This passive also avoids stating who made the mistakes.
30. **is expected to be released** Correct Answer: is expected to be released ✓ Explanation: The structure is/are + expected + to + be + past participle is a common passive reporting structure used to express what people anticipate will happen. Is expected to be released correctly combines passive reporting with a future passive infinitive.

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.