

Passive Voice for all Tenses - Rules

There are two basic rules for converting sentences from Active Voice into Passive Voice, which are common for all tenses.

1. The places of subject and object will be interchanged in the sentence.
2. Only 3rd form of the verb or Past Participle (e.g. written) will be used as a main verb in Passive Voice.

The rules for using 'Auxiliary Verb' in a sentence are different for each tense, as follows:

Present Simple Tense Auxiliary verbs used in Passive Voice: Is/are/am	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
He writes a letter.	A letter is written by him.
He does not write a letter.	A letter is not written by him.
Does he write a letter?	Is a letter written by him?
They sell books.	Books are sold by them.
She helps me.	I am helped by her.

Present Progressive Tense Auxiliary verbs used in Passive Voice: Is being / Are being / Am being	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
She is singing a song.	A song is being sung by her.
She is not singing a song.	A song is not being sung by her.
Is she singing a song?	Is a song being sung by her?
They are eating apples.	Apples are being eaten by them.
You are disturbing me.	I am being disturbed by you.

Present Perfect Tense Auxiliary verbs used in Passive Voice: Has been / Have been	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
He has completed the work.	The work has been completed by him.
He has not completed the work.	The work has not been completed by him.
Has he completed the work?	Has the work been completed by him?
She has written five poems.	Five poems have been written by her.
I have made some cakes.	Some cakes have been made by me.

Past Simple Tense Auxiliary verbs used in Passive Voice: Was / Were	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
He bought a car.	A car was bought by him.
He did not buy a car.	A car was not bought by him.
Did he buy a car?	Was a car bought by him?
She decorated the walls.	The walls were decorated by her.
I helped them.	They were helped by me.

Past Progressive Tense Auxiliary verbs used in Passive Voice: Was being / Were being	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
She was washing a shirt.	A shirt was being washed by her.
She was not washing a shirt.	A shirt was not being washed by her.
Was she washing a shirt?	Was a shirt being washed by her?
Boys were singing songs.	Songs were being sung by boys.

Past Perfect Tense Auxiliary verbs used in Passive Voice: Had been	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
They had won the game.	The game had been won by them.
They had not won the game.	The game had not been won by them.
Had they won the game?	Had the game been won by them?
He had collected coins.	Coins had been collected by him.

Future Simple Tense Auxiliary verbs used in Passive Voice: Will be	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
She will write a poem.	A poem will be written by her.
She will not write a poem.	A poem will not be written by her.
Will she write a poem?	Will a poem be written by her?
You will receive the letter.	The letter will be received by you.
They will arrange the money.	The money will be arranged by them.

Active and Passive Voice

An action of a subject, in relation to an object, is expressed in two ways. These two ways of expressing action of a subject are known as Voices.

1. Active Voice

2. Passive Voice

Example.

- I write a letter. (Active Voice)
- A letter is written by me. (Passive Voice)

The structure of same sentence changes when expressed as Active Voice or Passive Voice. The meaning of a sentence, either expressed as Active Voice or Passive Voice, remains the same.

■ Difference between Active Voice and Passive Voice.

The meaning or main idea of sentence, either expressed as Active Voice or Passive Voice does not change. The structure of a same sentence changes for Active Voice and Passive Voice. We know that every sentence have a subject, a verb and an object. Subject is an agent who works on an object in a sentence. In the above example, "I" is the subject of the sentence that is doing some work on the object 'letter' in the same sentence.

To understand the difference in both voices, we should focus on the subject and the object of a sentence. In Active Voice, the subject acts upon the object. In Passive Voice, the object is acted upon by the subject. The meaning remains the same in both Voices but the sequence of the words (subject & object) changes. The sequence, of subject and object as in Active Voice, is reversed when it is expressed in Passive Voice. Read the following example for better understanding this difference.

Active Voice	Passive Voice
I eat an apple.	An apple is eaten by me.
He bought a car.	A car was bought by him.

The sequence of the subject and the object of the sentence is reversed while converting the sentence from Active Voice to Passive Voice.

The structures of a same sentence, for both Voices, are as follows:

Active Voice: Subject + Verb + Object

Passive Voice: Object + Verb + Subject

■ Change in the Verb of a Sentence for changing Voice of a sentence

Apart from reversing the sequence of subject and object, the form of the verb of sentence also changes in both Voices. In the above example, you can see the change in the main verb as well as auxiliary verb of same sentence in both Voices. The only form of verb used in Passive Voice is the 3rd form of Verb which is also called Past Participle. Hence, the rule for changing verb for converting a sentence from Active Voice into Passive Voice is to use only 3rd form of Verb in Passive Voice. For changing the auxiliary verb for converting a sentence from Active Voice into Passive Voice, there are rules varying for tenses. To learn these rules, read the rules for Tenses as given in the links on this page.

■ Basic Rules For Changing Active Voices Into Passive Voices

Rule No. 1. As mentioned earlier, the structure of sentence will be reversed in Passive Voice. The places of the Subject and the object will interchange. The subject will shift to the place of Object and the object will take the place of Subject in Passive Voice.

Example:

Active Voice: He buys a camera.

Passive Voice: A camera is bought by him.

Rule No. 2. Only Past Participle Form or 3rd form of verb (e.g. eaten etc) will always be used as main verb in Passive voices for all tenses. No other form of verb will be used as main verb. It can be seen in all the examples given on this page.

Rule No. 3. The word "by" will be used before subject in the Passive voice.

Example:

Active Voice: She drinks water.

Passive Voice: Water is drunk by her.

Rule No. 4. Other words such as 'with' or 'to' may also be used instead of word 'by' depending upon the subject of the sentence. These words are used in a very few cases. The word 'by' is used in the most cases.

Examples:

Active Voice: I know him.

Passive Voice: He is known to me.

Active Voice: Water fills a tub.

Passive Voice: A tub is filled with water.

Rule No. 5. The auxiliary verb will be changed in Passive Voice depending upon the tense of sentence in its Active Voice. There are rules for changing the auxiliary for each tense which can also be studied on this website.

Passive voices for Present and Future Modals

(e.g. MAY, MIGHT, CAN, MUST, SHOULD, OUGHT TO)

Passive Voices for Present & Future Modals (e.g. MAY, MIGHT, CAN, MUST, SHOULD, OUGHT) Auxiliary Verb used in Passive Voice: Be	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
CAN	CAN BE
He can drive a car.	A car can be driven by him
He cannot drive a car.	A car cannot be driven by him.
Can he drive a car?	Can a car be driven by him?
MUST	MUST BE
He must learn this book.	This book must be learnt by him.
He must not learn this book.	This book must not be learnt by him.
Must he learn this book?	Must this book be learnt by him.
MAY	MAY BE
She may eat an apple.	An apple may be eaten by her.
She may not eat an apple.	An apple may not be eaten by her.
May she eat an apple?	May an apple be eaten by her?
MIGHT	MIGHT BE
She might kill the snake.	The snake might be killed by her.
She might not kill the snake.	The snake might not be killed by her.
Might she kill the snake?	Might the snake be killed by her?
SHOULD	SHOULD BE
I should buy this clock.	This clock should be bought by me.
I should not buy this clock.	This clock should not be bought by me.
Should I buy this clock?	Should this clock be bought by me?
OUGHT TO	OUGHT TO BE
You ought to help her.	She ought to be helped by you.
You ought not to help her.	She ought not to be helped by you.

Passive voices for Past Modals

(e.g. MIGHT HAVE, MAY HAVE, SHOULD HAVE, OUGHT TO HAVE, MUST HAVE)

Passive Voices for Past Modals (e.g. MIGHT HAVE, MAY HAVE, SHOULD HAVE, OUGHT HAVE, MUST HAVE) Auxiliary Verb used in Passive Voice: BEEN	
Active Voices	Passive Voices
SHOULD HAVE	SHOULD HAVE BEEN
I should have started a job.	A job should have been started by me.
I should not have started a job.	A job should not have been started by me.
Should I have started a job?	Should a job have been started by me?
MUST HAVE	MUST HAVE BEEN
He must have passed the exam.	The exam must have been passed by him.
He must not have passed the exam.	The exam must not have been passed by him.
MAY HAVE	MAY HAVE BEEN
You may have helped the kids.	The kids may have been helped by you.
You may not have helped the kids.	The kids may not have been helped by you.
MIGHT HAVE	MIGHT HAVE BEEN
He might have killed the snake.	The snake might have been killed by her.
He might have not killed the snake.	The snake might not have been killed by her.
OUGHT TO HAVE	OUGHT TO HAVE BEEN
You ought to have finished the task.	The task ought to have been finished by you.
You ought not to have finished the task.	The task ought not to have been finished by you.

Passive Voice for Imperative Sentences - Rules

A sentence that expresses a command or an advice or a request is called an **imperative sentence**. Here are some examples:

- Learn your lessons. (An advice)
- Open the door. (A command)
- Help the poor. (An Advice)
- Please, make a cup of tea. (A request)

Changing imperative sentences into Passive voice:

An imperative sentence does not have a known-subject. It reflects a message conveyed to the listener in the form of an advice, a request or a command. The listener of the sentence is assumed to be the subject, who is not directly mentioned in the sentence. Hence, imperative sentences in Passive Voice also do not have a mentioned-subject in the sentence.

There are three rules for converting an imperative sentence from Active Voice into Passive Voice.

1. The imperative sentence in Passive Voice begins with word "Let".
2. The word 'Be' is used as an auxiliary verb in Passive Voice of imperative sentences.
3. Base form (or 1st form of verb, e.g. write etc) is converted into **Past Participle (or 3rd form of verb e.g. written etc)** for making passive voice of imperative sentence.

Read the following examples for better understanding:

Passive Voice for Imperative Sentences	
Active Voice	Passive Voice
Respect the elders.	Let the elders be respected.
Finish the task.	Let the task be finished.
Do not waste the time.	Let the time not be wasted.
Close the door.	Let the door be closed.
Wash the shirts.	Let the shirts be washed.
Repair your camera.	Let your camera be repaired.
Open the window.	Let the window be opened.
Help the children.	Let the children be helped.
Throw the ball.	Let the ball be thrown.
Collect nice books.	Let nice books be collected.

Sentences which cannot be changed into Passive Voice

There are some types of sentences which cannot be converted into Passive Voice, as explained below:

Non-convertible Tenses

The sentences of following tenses cannot be converted into Passive Voice.

1. Present Perfect Continuous (or Progressive) Tense
2. Past Perfect Continuous (or Progressive) Tense
3. Future Perfect Continuous (or Progressive) Tense
4. Future Continuous (or Progressive) Tense

Sentences, having intransitive verb, cannot be converted into Passive Voices

There are two types of verbs: **transitive and intransitive verb**. A verb, that requires an object in sentence to give a complete meaning, is called transitive verb. Read the following example of transitive verb.

- He bought ____.
- He bought a book.

“Buy” is a transitive verb, because without an object (a book), it does not give complete idea. All such verbs that must have an object for them in sentence are called transitive verbs.

On the other hand, a verb which does not require an object in the sentence and can give a complete meaning (without an object), is called intransitive verb. Read the following example of intransitive verb.

- He laughs.

“Laugh” is intransitive verb. It does not require an object in sentence. Even without an object in sentence it can express complete idea. “Go, sleep, sit, reach, die” are few examples of the intransitive verbs.

The sentences, having intransitive verbs, cannot be converted into Passive Voice. The only reason for this is that such a sentence has no object. When a sentence has no object, it cannot be changed into Passive Voice. For changing a sentence into passive voice, the sentence must have clear known object.

Read the following examples of sentences having intransitive verbs which cannot be changed into Passive Voice.

Examples:

- He is sleeping.
- He is laughing.
- He has gone.
- He died in 2005.

WHEN TO USE PASSIVE VOICE

Although active voice is generally preferred in academic writing, passive voice is acceptable under certain conditions.

Use passive voice

- **to emphasize the receiver of the action instead of the doer**

Quizzes are given regularly.

Grades for all students are averaged.

Questions are encouraged

- **to keep the focus on the same subject through several sentences or paragraphs**

My sister and I grew up and went to school in Jamaica. We were educated according to the British system. In 1997 we were given the opportunity to come to the United States. We decided to finish high school before leaving our own country. We were concerned that the education in this country might not be as good as the one we had there, and we wanted to improve our English too.

- **when we do not know who performed the action:**

Ray's calculator was made in Germany.

The answers have been filled in.

- **when we do not wish to mention the doer of the action:**

Many problems have been ignored for too long.

I was given some bad advice.

Note: This use often reveals an unwillingness to take responsibility (or place it on someone else).

Substitute:

For:

"A mistake was made."

"I made a mistake."

"Not enough has been done to end homelessness."

"We have not done enough to end homelessness."

"You have been misinformed."

"You are wrong."

- **when we want to sound objective or avoid using the subject "I"**

Studies have shown . . .

It is well-known . . .

Hamlet is considered . . .

It can be assumed . . .

It has been

Instructor: Miss, G. Fatima