

ACTIVE and PASSIVE VOICE

Meaning and Use

In English, we can express sentences in two different ways: active voice and passive voice.

The **active voice** is used when the focus is on the subject (or agent) of the main verb. This is the person or thing doing the verb.

- Millions of people use the internet every day.
- A strong storm destroyed many houses in the village.
- Only six students passed the test.

The **passive voice** is used when the person or the thing affected by the main verb becomes the focus.

- The internet is used by millions of people every day.
- Many houses in the village were destroyed by a strong storm.
- The test was passed by only six students.

The passive is often used when the person or thing doing the verb is not important, unknown, or obvious. In this case, we may leave them out completely.

- The solution was heated to 100 degrees. (agent is unimportant)
- My bike was stolen last Thursday. (identity of agent is unknown)
- The president was voted into office. (agent is obvious)

Form

The **active voice** is made with subject + main verb + object.

- Bees make honey.
- James Cameron directed Titanic.
- Alex is repairing Bill's bicycle.

The **passive voice** is made with subject + to be + past participle + by + object.

Note that the active voice object becomes the passive voice subject. In the passive, the main verb is always the past participle.

Positive

- Honey is made by bees.
- Titanic was directed by James Cameron.
- Bill's bicycle is being repaired by Alex.

Negative

We make the negative passive with subject + negative of to be + past participle + by + object.

- Honey is not made by wasps.
- Titanic wasn't directed by George Lucas.
- Bill's bicycle is not being repaired by Alex.

Question

- Is honey made by bees?
- Was Titanic directed by James Cameron?
- Is Bill's bicycle being repaired by Alex?

Take note: describing a process

We can use the passive voice to describe processes in which the action is more important than the person performing it.

- The metal sheeting was heated and bent into shape before being cooled, polished, and finally painted.

Spoken English

When using the passive voice, **get** is sometimes used in place of the verb to be. This is especially common in informal, spoken English.

- I got fired for being late!
- These letters get delivered first.
- Your bike will get stolen if you don't lock it up.

EXERCISES

1. The Mona Lisa was painted _____
2. Don Quixote' was written _____
3. A lot of coffee is grown _____
4. I don't have my car at the moment. It's being repaired _____
5. The world's highest mountains are found _____
6. Breakfast will be served _____ in the hotel restaurant.
7. Many electronic goods are made _____
8. The first modern Olympic Games were held _____
9. This chicken's really dry. It's been cooked _____

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| A. In Japan | D. in Brazil | G. at the garage |
| B. between 7 and 10 am | E. for too long | H. by Miguel Cervantes |
| C. in the Himalayas | F. by Leonardo da Vinci | I. in 1986 |

Choose the correct form, active or passive, for each gap below

1. The police discovered a group of young women who _____ in an illegal factory.
A. were being exploited
B. have been exploited
C. were exploiting

2. A lot of measures _____ to fix the economy.
A. have been taken
B. are taking
C. have taken

3. I _____ you exactly what to do when we arrive.
 - A. will be shown
 - B. will show
 - C. am shown

4. He has no initiative. He needs _____ what to do all the time.
 - A. to be told
 - B. to tell
 - C. to been told

5. When do you think they _____ us the draft of the contract?
 - A. will send
 - B. will be sent
 - C. are they being sent

6. The new musical _____ next month at 24th Street's New Auditorium.
 - A. is going to be performed
 - B. is going to perform
 - C. is performed

7. Chicken wings _____ for 25 to 30 minutes.
 - A. should be baking
 - B. should bake
 - C. should be baked

8. Three people _____ after a bike _____ into a car last night.
 - A. injured / was crashed
 - B. were injured / crashed
 - C. injured / crashed

English Grammar

9. Road safety _____ in every school of the country.
- A. should teach
 - B. should be teaching
 - C. should be taught
10. After six months the students _____ to say many things in English.
- A. had learned
 - B. had been learned
 - C. had learning

Answers:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A	B	B	A	A	A	C	B	C	A

'USED TO' + infinitive

'BE' or 'GET USED TO' + '-ing'

Used to + infinitive and be/get used to + -ing look similar but they have very different uses.

USED TO

We use **used to + infinitive** to talk about a past situation that is no longer true. It tells us that there was a repeated action or state in the past which has now changed.

- She **used to** be a long-distance runner when she was younger.
- I **didn't use to** sleep very well, but then I started doing yoga and it really helps.
- **Did you use to** come here as a child?

BE USED TO and GET USED TO

Be used to means 'be familiar with' or 'be accustomed to'.

- She's **used to** the city now and doesn't get lost any more.
- He **wasn't used to** walking so much and his legs hurt after the hike.
- I'm a teacher so I'm **used to** speaking in public.

We use get used to to talk about the process of becoming familiar with something.

- I'm finding this new job hard but I'm sure I'll **get used to** it soon.
- It took my mother years to **get used to** living in London after moving from Pakistan.
- I'm **getting used to** the noise now. I found it really stressful when I first moved in.

Be used to and get used to are followed by a noun, pronoun or the -ing form of a verb, and can be used about the past, present or future.

Do you understand the difference between *I used to drive on the left* and *I'm used to driving on the left*?

Look at these examples to see how used to, get used to and be used to are used.

- I **used to** want to be a lawyer but then I realised how hard they work!
- How's Boston? **Are** you **used to** the cold weather yet?
- No matter how many times I fly, I'll never **get used to** take-off and landing!

EXERCISES

1. She _____ in a Telco company but she left and got a job as a carpenter.
 - A. used to working
 - B. used to work
 - C. got used to work

2. Since we had the baby I _____ much sleep.
 - A. 'm not used to get
 - B. used to get
 - C. 've got used to not getting

3. How's the new job? _____ it yet?
 - A. Are you used to
 - B. Did you use to
 - C. Do you used to

4. Before I retired I _____ have much time to read.
- A. never used to
 - B. used to
 - C. got used to
5. When we were at university, we _____ have to write an essay a week.
- A. got used to
 - B. used to
 - C. were used to
6. Don't worry! You _____ in the city centre after a while.
- A. 'll used to live
 - B. 'll get used to live
 - C. 'll get used to living
7. Our house is on a steep hill, but I _____ the walk after a month of living here.
- A. got used to
 - B. get used to
 - C. used to
8. The engine noise was deafening but the driver _____ it.
- A. was used to
 - B. used to
 - C. didn't use to

Answers: 1B – 2C – 3A – 4A – 5B – 6C – 7B – 8A