

## English tenses

# Present simple passive

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### Grammar rules with examples

We make the present simple passive with the present simple forms of the verb 'to be' and the past participle, which is different for regular verbs (*translated, mended*) and irregular verbs (*written, thrown*).

*I am surprised.*  
*You are surprised.*  
*He/she/it is surprised.*  
*We are surprised.*  
*They are surprised.*

We make questions and negative forms in the following way.

Questions: *Are the letters translated? Is the email written?*  
Negatives: *The letters are not written. The email is not written.*

### Passive voice with direct and indirect objects

If there are both the direct and indirect objects in the sentence, the indirect object becomes the subject.

Active: *My boyfriend sends me presents.*  
Passive: *I am sent presents by my boyfriend.*  
(Not: *Presents are sent to me by my boyfriend.* This sentence does not sound natural in English.)

Similarly:  
*They offer Trevor a place. - Trevor is offered a place.*

### Passive with verbs followed by the infinitive without to

In the active some verbs are followed by the infinitive without to. In the passive we use most such verbs with the infinitive with to.

Active: *We hear them argue. She makes him do it.*  
Passive: *They are heard to argue. He is made to do it.*  
But: *They let us watch TV at night. - We are let watch TV at night.*

## Use

The passive voice is used:

1. If the action is more important than the agent.

*A demonstration is held in Trafalgar Square. Your car is repaired.* (The important thing is what happens, not who does it.)

2. If the agent is not known.

*He is offered a job.* (Someone offers him the job.)

*They are supposed to be good students.* (Some teachers suppose that.)

If we want to say who does an action, we mention the agent at the end of the sentence and use the preposition 'by'.

*The birds are fed by my mother.*

But: *The tree is cut with a saw.* (The saw is not the agent. We do not know who cut the tree. We only know how he or she did it.)

### Present simple passive vs. present continuous passive

The simple and continuous forms have a completely different meaning.

*A new house is built in our street.* (The house is finished.)

*A new house is being built in our street.* (They are building it these days, it is not finished.)

*All your bills are paid.* (Someone has already paid them.)

*All your bills are being paid.* (Someone is working on it just now.)

### Notes

The passive voice is typical of an impersonal and formal style, that is why you can often find it in public notices, announcements, instructions or scientific articles.

*English is spoken in this shop. Visitors are not allowed to smoke. The seal must be removed.*

In a less formal style the active is more usual.

*English is spoken in this shop. - We speak English in this shop.*

*The seal must be removed. - You must remove the seal.*

In the English language the passive is more frequent than in many other languages. Moreover, you can find some structures in English which are not possible in some languages.

*I am told that you are going to have a baby. It is thought that the crises will end soon.*

### Present simple passive exercises:

[www.e-grammar.org/present-simple-passive/](http://www.e-grammar.org/present-simple-passive/)

**Our tip:** [www.e-grammar.org/pdf-books/](http://www.e-grammar.org/pdf-books/) All PDF exercises + grammar rules in one place.