

A2 · TEENS · LESSON 17 · PASSIVE VOICE

*English **is spoken** everywhere.*

When the action matters more than the doer, English flips the sentence around. The thing that receives the action becomes the subject. This is the **passive voice** — the language of news, science, mystery, and instructions. Master *be + past participle* across four tenses, and you'll read English the way it's actually written.

be + V3 (past participle)

The core formula

4 tenses · 1 pattern

Present · Past · Future · Modal

action → spotlight

Why we use it

/

Warm-Up

Who did it · or just what was done?

The detective and the thief...

Sometimes English doesn't tell you *who* did something — only that it *was done*. This is the magic of passive voice. Look at each pair below. The first sentence is **active**. Try to rephrase it as a **passive** sentence (it might sound mysterious!).

1. "Someone **stole** my bike." → "My bike _____ stolen." (*past simple passive*)
2. "They **speak** Portuguese in Brazil." → "Portuguese _____ spoken in Brazil." (*present*)
3. "They **will build** a new school." → "A new school _____ built." (*future*)
4. "You **must wash** your hands." → "Hands _____ washed." (*modal*)

//

Grammar Focus

Passive Voice: present, past, future, modal

The *passive voice* is what happens when we flip a sentence around. Instead of saying "Someone broke the window," we say "The window was broken." The **thing receiving the action** becomes the subject — the *doer* disappears (or moves to the end with *by*).

The formula is the same in every tense: **be + past participle** (also called the V3 form). What changes is the *tense of "be"*. Once you know that, all four tenses work the same way: present, past, future, and modal. Learn the pattern once, use it everywhere.

THE CORE FORMULA

Subject + **be** + **past participle (V3)** (+ by ...)

"The cake **is baked** by the chef." · "The window **was broken** last night."

FOUR TENSES, ONE PATTERN — THE PASSIVE TABLE

Just change the form of "be"

Every passive sentence has the same shape. Only the form of **be** shifts to mark the tense. Here are the four you need at A2:

PRESENT · IS/ARE + V3

"English **is spoken** in 60 countries."

For facts, habits, timeless truths. **am / is / are + V3**.

PAST · WAS/WERE + V3

"The Eiffel Tower **was built** in 1889."

For finished past actions. **was / were + V3**.

FUTURE · WILL BE + V3

"The new bridge **will be opened** next month."

For future plans and predictions. **will be + V3**.

MODAL · MODAL + BE + V3

"This form **must be signed** by your parents."

For rules and obligations. **must / can / should + be + V3**.

Spot the pattern: in every example, the verb form is identical — *spoken, built, opened, signed* are all V3 (past participles). Only "be" changes.

USE 1 · THE DOER IS UNKNOWN OR UNIMPORTANT**When you don't know — or don't need to say — *who***

This is the most common reason for passive voice. We don't know who broke the window. We don't care who built the bridge a hundred years ago. The action matters; the doer doesn't.

"My phone **was stolen** yesterday." (*I don't know who.*)

"This temple **was built** 800 years ago." (*Doesn't matter who.*)

"Tea **is grown** in many countries." (*Many growers; not specific.*)

USE 2 · FOCUS ON THE THING THAT HAPPENED**When the receiver is more interesting than the doer**

News reports, scientific writing, instructions. The reader cares about the thing being acted on — the result, the discovery, the building. Passive puts that thing first.

"A new vaccine **has been developed**." (*News.*)

"The painting **will be sold** at auction next week."

"Students **are not allowed** to use phones in class."

USE 3 · AGENT WITH "BY"

When the doer matters — add "by"

Sometimes you *do* want to mention the doer. Add **by + person/thing** at the end. Common in writing about authors, inventors, painters, builders, designers.

"*Hamlet* **was written** by Shakespeare."

"The vaccine **was discovered** by a team of scientists."

"This dress **was made** by my grandmother."

△ THE CLASSIC A2 TRAP

Don't forget the *past participle* (V3) — not the past simple (V2)

The most common mistake at A2: confusing the second verb form (V2 — for past simple) with the third form (V3 — for passive and perfect). Many irregular verbs have **different V2 and V3 forms**. Always use **V3** after "be".

X WRONG

"The window **was broke**." (*broke* = V2)

✓ RIGHT

"The window **was broken**." (*broken* = V3)

X WRONG

"This song **is sang** everywhere." (*sang* = V2)

✓ RIGHT

"This song **is sung** everywhere." (*sung* = V3)

**Key Vocabulary**

10 essential past participles (V3) for the passive

VERB (V1)	PAST (V2)	V3 (passive)	EXAMPLE IN PASSIVE
build	built	built	This temple was built in the 12th century.
break	broke	broken	The window was broken by a stone.
write	wrote	written	1984 was written by George Orwell.
make	made	made	This bread is made with olive oil.
steal	stole	stolen	My phone was stolen on the bus.
grow	grew	grown	Coffee is grown in Brazil and Ethiopia.
speak	spoke	spoken	Spanish is spoken in 21 countries.
find	found	found	The lost dog was found in the park.
invent	invented	invented	The telephone was invented by Bell.
protect	protected	protected	Rhinos are protected in this reserve.

IV Reading

Four stories, four passive tenses

THE THINGS ARE DONE ISSUE · VOLUME 17

What **was made, was lost, will be built, must be saved**

A silk factory in Bangkok, a stolen bike in Mexico City, a school newspaper in Dublin, and a wildlife reserve in Nairobi. Four teenagers, four ways to put the action first.

STORY ONE · THE SILK FACTORY TOUR

Sirikit, 14 · Bangkok

Sirikit's aunt works at a silk factory just outside Bangkok. Today, Sirikit visits for the first time. The guide, an older woman called *Khun Anong*, walks the visitors through every step.

"This is where the silkworms are kept," says *Khun Anong*. "Then the cocoons **are boiled** in hot water. The threads **are pulled** out very carefully, and **are wound** onto wooden frames. After that, the silk **is dyed** in the colours you see on the wall. Some patterns **are still made** the way they were five hundred years ago."

Sirikit watches a woman at a wooden loom. "How long does one scarf take?" Sirikit asks her aunt. "Each scarf **is woven** in about three days. The most expensive ones **are made** in three weeks. They **are sold** all over the world — Tokyo, Paris, New York."

On the bus home, Sirikit thinks: I bought a silk scarf in the gift shop yesterday. I never thought about how it *was made*. From now on, I will.

PRESENT PASSIVE · is/are + V3 Notice the chain of verbs: *are kept, are boiled, are pulled, are wound, is dyed, are made, is woven, are sold*. The doer (the workers) is implied but never named — the focus is on the silk, not the silk-makers.

STORY TWO · A BIKE, GONE

Diego, 16 · Mexico City

Diego left his bike outside the convenience store for fifteen minutes. Maybe twenty. When he came out, the bike **was gone**.

"It **was locked**," he tells his older sister Camila. "The chain **was attached** to the railing. But when I came out, the chain **had been cut**. The bike **was taken**." The bike was a birthday present from his late grandfather.

The next day, the family files a police report. "These reports **are filed** every day," the officer says kindly. "Most bikes **are not found**. But sometimes, they **are sold** at the Sunday market."

Two weeks pass. Then on Wednesday morning, Diego gets a call. A woman **was caught** at the market trying to sell a bike with a familiar sticker: a small Mexican flag, slightly torn. "Your bike **has been recovered**," the officer says. "It **will be returned** to you tomorrow." Diego cries when he sees it.

PAST PASSIVE · was/were + V3 The whole story is built on past passives: *was gone, was locked, was attached, had been cut, was taken, was caught, has been recovered, will be returned*. We never learn the thief's name — the focus stays on the bike.

STORY THREE · THE SCHOOL NEWSPAPER

Aoife, 15 · Dublin

Aoife is the new editor of her school's newspaper, *The Compass*. Her first issue is due on Friday. News, she's been told, is mostly written in the **passive voice**.

She drafts the front page. "A new library **will be opened** next month. The ribbon **will be cut** by the Lord Mayor. Over 5,000 books **have been donated** by local families. The architect, who designed it for free, **will be honoured** at the ceremony."

Inside, she writes about the school choir. "The choir **was invited** to perform at the National Concert Hall last spring. They **were chosen** from over a hundred Irish schools. Two students **were given** solo parts. A standing ovation **was received**."

On the back page, sports: "The girls' hockey team **was beaten** in the final, 2-1. A rematch **has been requested**. It **will be played** next term." Friday morning, the paper is in every classroom. She barely used the word "I" anywhere. The events — *they* were the heroes.

FUTURE & PERFECT PASSIVE News writing favours the passive: *will be opened, will be cut, have been donated, was invited, were chosen, has been requested, will be played*. The institution or event always takes the spotlight.

STORY FOUR · THE VOICE OF THE RHINOS

Wanjiru, 17 · Nairobi

Wanjiru spent her summer at Ol Pejeta, a wildlife reserve in central Kenya. She was one of twenty teenagers chosen as a junior volunteer. Her job was to help the rangers and write a report at the end.

Her report opens: "Twenty-three rhinos **are protected** in this reserve, including the last two northern white rhinos on Earth. They **must be guarded** twenty-four hours a day. Every animal **is monitored** by GPS. The horns of some rhinos **have been removed** — safely, by veterinarians — so they **cannot be sold** to poachers."

"This place **was opened** in 2004," she continues. "Since then, no rhino **has been killed** here. But the threat is real. Across Africa, three rhinos **are killed** every day. They **cannot be saved** by one country alone. They **must be protected** by everyone."

She gives the report to the head ranger. "Wanjiru," he says, "you didn't just write about us. You wrote *for* us. The animals can't speak. So we speak for them — in the passive, because the question is not who *is* protecting. The question is who *must be* protected."

MODAL PASSIVE · must/can + be + V3 Wanjiru's report uses the passive in two registers: *are protected, are monitored, have been removed, was opened, has been killed* for facts; and *must be guarded, cannot be sold, cannot be saved, must be protected* for moral obligations.

V

Practice

Choose the correct passive form

Choose the correct passive form for each sentence. Coloured tags show which tense or rule applies.

LEGEND: PRESENT · is/are PAST · was/were FUTURE · will be MODAL · must/can be V3 form · -en/-n

- Spanish ____ in many countries. **PRESENT · is/are**
 - A speaks
 - B is spoken
 - C was spoken
- The Eiffel Tower ____ in 1889. **PAST · was/were**
 - A is built
 - B built
 - C was built
- A new shopping centre ____ next year. **FUTURE · will be**
 - A will be opened
 - B will open
 - C opens
- All forms ____ by your parents. (rule) **MODAL · must/can be**
 - A must sign
 - B must be sign
 - C must be signed
- My phone ____ from my bag yesterday. **PAST · was/were**
 - A was stole
 - B was stolen
 - C stole
- Tea ____ in many tropical countries. **PRESENT · is/are**
 - A is grown
 - B grew
 - C grows
- "Don't worry — the homework ____ tomorrow morning." (promise) **FUTURE · will be**
 - A finishes
 - B finished
 - C will be finished

8. *Romeo and Juliet* _____ by William Shakespeare. **V3 form · -en/-n**
- A *was wrote* B *was written* C *wrote*

VI

Speaking

Use the passive to talk about places, products & news

What is made ... what was built ... what will be done?

ANSWER EACH PROMPT USING THE PASSIVE VOICE (BE + V3)

For each topic, give 2-3 sentences. Try to use a different tense each time: **present, past, future, modal**. Don't worry about who does the action — focus on what happens to the thing.

1. Tell me about a famous building in your country. *When was it built? By whom? What is it used for today?*
2. Describe a typical product from your region. *How is it made? Where is it sold? What is it used for?*
3. Talk about a recent piece of news. *What was done? Who was involved? What will happen next?*
4. Describe one rule at your school. *What must be done? What is not allowed? Why?*
5. Tell me about something that was lost or stolen — from history, fiction, or your own life.

MODEL DIALOGUE — TALKING ABOUT HAGIA SOPHIA

A: "Tell me about a famous building in your country."

B: "The Hagia Sophia *was built* in 537 by the Byzantine emperor Justinian. For 900 years it *was used* as a church. Then it *was converted* into a mosque, later into a museum."

A: "What about today?"

B: "Today it *is used* as a mosque again. Millions of tourists *are welcomed* there every year."

A: "And the rules — can it *be photographed* inside?"

B: "Yes, but shoes *must be removed*, and silence *is requested* during prayer times."

VI

Writing

A short report (80-120 words)

Test your passive voice — Quick Check

Choose the best answer. 8 questions.

Q1 OF 8 · FORMULA**Choose the correctly-formed passive sentence:**

- A English speaks in many countries.
- B English is speaking in many countries.
- C English is spoken in many countries.
- D English be spoken in many countries.

Q2 OF 8 · V3 FORM**"The window ____ during the storm." (past)**

- A was broke
- B was broken
- C broke
- D is broken

Q3 OF 8 · FUTURE PASSIVE**"The new metro line ____ next September."**

- A will be opened
- B will open
- C will be open
- D opens

Q4 OF 8 · MODAL PASSIVE**"This door ____ at all times." (safety rule)**

- A must close
- B must closed
- C must be closed
- D must be close

Q5 OF 8 · ACTIVE VS PASSIVE**Which sentence is in the active voice (NOT passive)?**

- A The cake was eaten.
- B A new bridge will be built.
- C Coffee is grown in Brazil.
- D My mother bakes the bread.

Q6 OF 8 · "BY" + AGENT**Rewrite as passive: "Picasso painted *Guernica*."**

- A *Guernica* painted Picasso.
- B *Guernica* was painted by Picasso.
- C *Guernica* is paint by Picasso.
- D *Guernica* was paint by Picasso.

Q7 OF 8 · READING RECALL**In Story Four, Wanjiru writes that the rhinos...**

- A can be sold to poachers.
- B are killed every day in Kenya.
- C must be protected by everyone.
- D were forgotten by the world.

Q8 OF 8 · FIND THE MISTAKE**Which passive sentence is *incorrect*?**

- A Spanish is spoken in 21 countries.
- B The cake was made by my grandmother.
- C All forms must be signed today.
- D The book was wrote in 1923.

Answer Key

PRACTICE (PART VI)

1. B 2. C 3. A 4. C 5. B 6. A 7. C 8. B

QUIZ (PART IX)

Q1. C Q2. B Q3. A Q4. C Q5. D Q6. B Q7. C Q8. D