

Study this example:



Was built is *passive*.

Compare active and passive:

Somebody **built** this house in 1935. (*active*)
subject *object*

This house **was built** in 1935. (*passive*)
subject

When we use an active verb, we say *what the subject does*:

- ❑ My grandfather was a builder. **He built** this house in 1935.
- ❑ It's a big company. **It employs** two hundred people.

When we use a passive verb, we say *what happens to the subject*:

- ☐ This house is quite old. It **was built** in 1935.
- ☐ **Two hundred people** are employed by the company.

When we use the passive, who or what causes the action is often unknown or unimportant:

- ☐ A lot of money **was stolen** in the robbery. (somebody stole it, but we don't know who)
- ☐ Is this room **cleaned** every day? (does somebody clean it? – it's not important who)

If we want to say who does or what causes the action, we use **by ...** :

- ☐ This house was built **by my grandfather**.
- ☐ Two hundred people are employed **by the company**.

The passive is **be (is/was etc.) + past participle** (done/cleaned/seen etc.):
(be) done (be) cleaned (be) damaged (be) built (be) seen etc.

For irregular past participles (**done/seen/known** etc.), see Appendix 1.

Study the active and passive forms of the *present simple* and *past simple*:

Present simple

active: clean(s) / see(s) etc.

Somebody cleans **this room** every day.

passive: am/is/are + cleaned/seen etc.

This room is cleaned every day.

- ☐ Many accidents **are caused** by careless driving.
- ☐ I'm **not often invited** to parties.
- ☐ How is this word **pronounced**?

Past simple

active: cleaned/saw etc.

Somebody cleaned **this room** yesterday.

passive: was/were + cleaned/seen etc.

This room was cleaned yesterday.

- ❑ We **were woken** up by a loud noise during the night.
- ❑ ‘Did you go to the party?’ ‘No, I **wasn’t invited**.’
- ❑ How much money **was stolen** in the robbery?

Exercises

Unit 42

42.1 Complete the sentences using one of these verbs in the correct form, present or past:

~~cause~~ damage hold invite make
overtake show surround translate write

- 1 Many accidents are caused by dangerous driving.
- 2 Cheese from milk.
- 3 The roof of the building in a storm a few days ago.
- 4 You to the wedding. Why didn't you go?
- 5 A cinema is a place where films
- 6 In the United States, elections for president every four years.
- 7 Originally the book in Spanish, and a few years ago it
..... into English.
- 8 Although we were driving quite fast, we by a lot of other cars.
- 9 You can't see the house from the road. It by trees.

42.2 Write questions using the passive. Some are present and some are past.

- 1 Ask about glass. (how / make?) How is glass made?
- 2 Ask about television. (when / invent?)
- 3 Ask about mountains. (how / form?)
- 4 Ask about Pluto (*the planet*). (when / discover?)
- 5 Ask about silver. (what / use for?)

42.3 Put the verb into the correct form, present simple or past simple, active or passive.

- 1 It's a big factory. Five hundred people are employed (employ) there.
- 2 Did somebody clean (somebody / clean) this room yesterday?
- 3 Water (cover) most of the earth's surface.
- 4 How much of the earth's surface (cover) by water?
- 5 The park gates (lock) at 6.30 p.m. every evening.
- 6 The letter (post) a week ago and it (arrive) yesterday.
- 7 The boat hit a rock and (sink) quickly. Fortunately everybody
..... (rescue).
- 8 Richard's parents (die) when he was very young. He and his sister
..... (bring up) by their grandparents.
- 9 I was born in London, but I (grow up) in Canada.
- 10 While I was on holiday, my camera (steal) from my hotel room.
- 11 While I was on holiday, my camera (disappear) from my hotel room.
- 12 Why (Sue / resign) from her job? Didn't she enjoy it?
- 13 Why (Bill / sack) from his job? What did he do wrong?
- 14 The company is not independent. It (own) by a much larger company.
- 15 I saw an accident last night. Somebody (call) an ambulance but nobody
..... (injure), so the ambulance (not / need).
- 16 Where (these photographs / take)? In London?
..... (you / take) them, or somebody else?
- 17 Sometimes it's quite noisy living here, but it's not a problem for me –
I (not / bother) by it.

42.4 Rewrite these sentences. Instead of using somebody, they, people etc., write a passive sentence.

- 1 Somebody cleans the room every day. The room is cleaned every day.
- 2 They cancelled all flights because of fog. All
- 3 People don't use this road much.
- 4 Somebody accused me of stealing money. I
- 5 How do people learn languages? How
- 6 Somebody warned us not to go out alone.