

The passive

English Grammar · B1

Present / Past Simple Passive

Active → passive

Active	Passive
doer first	be + past participle
<i>Lu Xun wrote it</i>	<i>It was written by ...</i>

Active → passive: reference card grid

The passive voice places the **receiver of the action** in the subject position, emphasizing “what happened to” rather than who performed the action.

Structure: + **be** + (the tense of be determines the sentence’s tense)

- Present Simple Passive: am / is / are + past participle.
- Past Simple Passive: was / were + past participle.

English is spoken here.

English is spoken here.

The window was broken.

The window was broken.

Note Active to Passive: The object moves to the subject position, and the verb changes to **be + past participle**. *They built it.* → *It was built.*

by + Agent

To specify “**by whom**” the action was done, use **by + agent**:

This book was written by Lu Xun.

This book was written by Lu Xun.

When to use the passive?

- When the doer is unknown or unimportant: *The road was repaired.*
- To emphasize the receiver: *The painting was bought by a museum.*

Note If the agent is unimportant, **by ...** is often omitted: *The shop is closed.*

Common Errors

- × ~~The window was broke. / The book was wrote by him.~~ → ✓ was **broken** / was **written** — Use the **past participle** for the passive, not the past simple; memorize the third column of irregular verbs.
- × ~~It was happened last night.~~ → ✓ It **happened** last night. — Intransitive verbs like happen, appear, and die **do not have a passive form**.
- × ~~My phone was stolen by someone.~~ → ✓ My phone was stolen. — by someone / by people is redundant; delete it directly.
- Chinese says “I was born in...” using an active structure, but English always uses the passive: ✓ I **was born** in Chengdu.