How to use the Passive Voice in English

⚠ In this lesson the passive, the passive form and the passive voice mean the same thing.

How to form the passive voice in English:

Subject + to be + past participle

- A letter was written.

Why use the passive form in English?

The active voice is used to say what the subject is doing. On the contrary, we use the passive voice (or form) to put more importance on the action performed:

- **Active:** He drove the car yesterday.
  
  **Passive:** The car was driven by him yesterday.

- **Active:** I clean my house once a week.
  
  **Passive:** My house is cleaned once a week.

Sometimes, we use the passive in English when we don't know who did the action:

- My car was made in Japan.
- My phone has been stolen.

This is sometimes specified in the sentence with 'by', but it is not as important as the action that has been carried out:

- It was sent by Paul yesterday.
- I was told by Tina.

We often use the passive form to talk about the subject at the beginning of the sentence:

- The fruits are all grown by local farmers.
- This window should be replaced when you have time.

⚠ **Note:** it is necessary to say "I was born" and not "I am born":

- I was born in 1983 ✓
- I am born in 1983. ✗
- She was born in the same year as me.

⚠ **Note:** the passive voice of 'verb+ing' is 'being + past participle':

- I don't like him staring at me. (active)
- I don't like being stared at. (passive)
- I hate people talking to me at the library. (active)
- I hate being talked to at the library. (passive)

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When things happen or change, especially in everyday English, we can use 'get' instead of 'be' on the passive:

- There was an accident but nobody was hurt.
- There was an accident but nobody got hurt.

- I was offered the job but I didn't take it.
- I got offered the job but I didn't take it.

The impersonal passive

Impersonal passive is rarely used in everyday English, but it is sometimes found in texts. It is only possible with perception verbs (think, know, believe, believe, claim, say...).

The subject must be replaced by 'it is + past participle + that':

- Active: People say that he left the town two weeks ago.
- Passive: It is said that he left the town two weeks ago.