

# Teaching the Passive Voice

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The Passive voice is taught in schools by giving the students grammar rules for transformation of sentences from active to passive and vice-versa. Teachers forget that the passive voice in English has got its own function to perform and is not just an alternative to the active.

There are two kinds of the passive verb – *Static* and *Dynamic*. The *static passive verb* refers to some state or condition and it cannot be changed to the passive. For example,

*The door is closed.*

*Shops are closed on Sundays.*

In the first sentence, we are not concerned with *who* has shut the door and we may also not know. In the second sentence, it is obvious who has closed the shop. In both cases, we are not concerned who has performed the action. In the first, we don't know; in the second, it is obvious that only the shopkeepers have closed their shops. So, the static passive verb should be taught only by using it in a specific context or situation. It cannot be taught in any other way.

The *dynamic passive verb* is not used just as an alternative to the active passive verb. It has also got its own function. It is used in English when the doer of the action or the performer of the action is not known or

maybe we are not concerned with who has performed the action. We are concerned only with the action or its result. For example,

*Many houses were destroyed in the fire that broke out yesterday.*

Here we are concerned only with what happened in the fire that broke out and not how it broke out. In other words, we are concerned only with the result.

When we use the passive verb in the sentence, *The Taj Mahal was built by Shajahan*, we are not concerned with what Shajahan did but only with the Taj Mahal he built. If, on the other hand, we say *Shajahan built the Taj Mahal*, we want to say that it was Shajahan who built the Taj Mahal and not anyone else.

So, the passive verb is to be used when we don't know the performer of some action or are not interested in who has performed some action.

From what has been said above, it is clear that the passive verb should not be taught just as an alternative to the active verb by giving exercises in transformation of sentences but only through contextualization. You may use situations taken from everyday life or by creating appropriate situations in the class with the help of pictures or models.