



THE PASSIVE VOICE

The passive voice is used for descriptive writing, especially descriptions of processes or procedures.

The process or procedure essay either tells how something is done or explains how something happens.

For this kind of writing, it is not necessary to mention the person or thing doing the action, rather the emphasis is placed on the action itself. Thus, passive constructions are important for this style of writing.

In *IELTS Writing Task 1*, you may be asked to describe a process or a procedure. The passive voice is commonly used for these kinds of descriptions.

In passive constructions, the subject **receives** the action and the focus is on **what happens** to the subject. The person or thing responsible for the action is either unknown or unimportant.

For example:

Air pollution was investigated in the study.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Active voice: subject of the sentence does the action and is called the **agent**

ABC television screened **the English language series**.
subject/agent *object*

active form: subject/agent + verb + (+object)

STUDY TIPS

When describing a process or procedure in IELTS Writing Task 1, it is important to use passive constructions. This makes your writing impersonal and, thus, more formal.

For general descriptions of a process or procedure, the present passive is commonly used.

When reporting a particular procedure, such as the procedure in conducting a survey, past passive verb forms are commonly used.

Remember to use sequence markers, for example first, then, after that, finally. These make your writing cohesive and your sentences flow smoothly.

Passive voice: subject receives the action, shifting the focus from the agent to the object

The English language series was screened by ABC television.
Subject *agent*

passive form: subject + be + past participle (+ by + agent)

ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE VERB FORMS

TENSES	ACTIVE FORM	PASSIVE FORM
INFINITIVE	to perform	to be performed
Simple present	perform(s)	is/are performed
Simple present continuous	is/are performing	is/are being performed
Present perfect	has/have performed	has/have been performed
Simple past	performed	was/were performed
Simple past continuous	was/were performing	was/were being performed

Compare the following **irregular past participle verb forms**:

INFINITIVE	Present Participle	SIMPLE PAST	Past Participle
be	being	was/were	been
bend	bending	bent	bent
do	doing	did	done
draw	drawing	drew	drawn
give	giving	gave	given
grow	growing	grew	grown
have	having	had	had
hold	holding	held	held
make	making	made	made
prove	proving	proved	proved/proven
read	reading	read	read
shake	shaking	shook	shaken
teach	teaching	taught	taught
understand	understanding	understood	understood
write	writing	wrote	written

Passive constructions can only be made from **transitive verbs** because these verbs can have objects. Examples of verbs that cannot occur with passive constructions include: *happen, occur, seem, die, live*.