

ENGLISH for ENGINEERS

How to Form the Passive

This worksheet explains how to change a sentence from the active to the passive. You may want to do this to avoid using personal language, such as *I* or *we*, or to change the focus of a sentence.

Overview

Active	The scientist	attaches		the weight	
	Subject + Agent*	Main verb		Object	
Passive	The weight	is	attached	by	the weight
	Subject	Main verb	Auxiliary verb (past participle)	Object + Agent* (optional)	

* Note:

- 1) The *agent* is the person or thing that does the action.
- 2) The *main verb* changes to show tense (e.g. attached - past simple; attaches - present simple) and person (e.g. I attach – first person; the scientist attaches –third person)
- 3) The *auxiliary verb* in passive structures is always in the past participle form. Therefore, it does not change to indicate tense or person.

Three Steps to forming the passive

Step 1: The subject and the object swap positions so that the agent becomes the object.

Active	The scientist	attaches	the weight
Step 1	The weight	attaches	by the scientist

Step 2: The active sentence's main verb is changed into the past participle, and the verb 'to be' is added as the main verb.

Active	The scientist	attaches	the weight
Step 1	The weight	attaches	the scientist
Step 2	The weight	is	attached
			the scientist

Step 3: 'by' is added in front of the new agent/object

Active	The scientist	attaches	the weight		
Step 1	The weight	attaches	the scientist		
Step 2	The weight	is	attached	the scientist	
Step 3 (passive)	The weight	is	attached	by	the scientist
<i>Notes</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Main verb (this is the verb that changes to indicate tense e.g. 'will be', 'was')</i>	<i>Auxiliary verb (past participle) – this stays in the past participle form irrespective of tense.</i>	<i>This can be deleted.</i>	

A note on changing the imperative into the passive

Lab instructions are usually written in the imperative, as a command, such as 'attach the weight'. Sometimes students have difficulty changing this into the passive because there is no subject. In this case, it may be helpful to first add a subject, and then follow the steps above for then changing it into the passive.

For example,

Attach the weight.	Lab instructions written in the imperative.
You attach the weight.	Add in a subject e.g. 'you' to form an active sentence.
The weight was attached.	Follow the three steps above to change this active sentence into the passive.