

A to Z English



Episode: A to Z Grammar 002: The Active vs. Passive Voice

Website: <http://atozenglishpodcast.com>

Change these sentences from the active voice to the passive voice:

1. *I ate the sandwich.*
2. *Somebody stole the car.*
3. *Graham Bell invented the telephone.*
4. *J.K. Rowling wrote the Harry Potter books.*

Full Transcript

00:00:02 Jack

You are listening to the A-Z English podcast.

00:00:10 Kevin

Welcome to an A-Z English grammar from A-Z. Today we're going to be looking at another grammar point, and we know that grammar isn't the most interesting and most fun, but it is important, and as we've talked about before, it really does help people understand you.

00:00:27 Kevin

You can remember to check our website for vocabulary notes and discussion questions and join our WhatsApp and Facebook page.

00:00:33 Kevin

Or you can join in the discussion and try and use the grammar points that.

00:00:35 Kevin

We're talking about.

00:00:36 Kevin

Today so Jack, I wanted to talk about something that I've noticed a lot recently because I edit the the student news.

00:00:46 Kevin

Paper at our university, right?

00:00:49 Kevin

And I've noticed a lot of the student writers are really.

00:00:55 Kevin

They make a lot of mistakes at mixing up active versus passive voice.

00:01:01 Kevin

And active versus passive voice, I think are great, and both have their own uses, but we need to know when to when to use them, of course, because that's The thing is, they're both correct.

00:01:13 Kevin

It's it's both good grammar, but if you use it the wrong place it it feels different, right?

00:01:19 Jack

This is the one grammar point where I would say it has a lot to do with style more than it has to do with correct grammar.

00:01:29 Jack

So if you don't understand it, I would say don't use it.

00:01:30 Jack 3

Right.

00:01:34 Jack

Don't use the passive if you don't really understand it and it's not, it's not necessary.

00:01:38 Kevin

That's safe.

00:01:40 Jack

Yeah, you don't have to use it.

00:01:40 Kevin

That's safe.

00:01:41 Kevin

Yeah, it's.

00:01:41 Kevin

Stick to active and we'll define these in a minute for everybody.

00:01:44 Kevin

Stick to active until you know when and where to use it.

00:01:48 Kevin

And this definitely is a bit more of an advanced grammar.

00:01:51 Kevin

You know, last week we talked about much more beginner grammar.

00:01:54 Kevin

This is a bit tougher.

00:01:55 Kevin

Because it's really about style, like you said.

00:01:59 Kevin

So let's start off what's active grammar or active voice rather.

00:02:03 Kevin

Not grammar.

00:02:03 Kevin

What's active voice?

00:02:04 Kevin

This is the easy one.

00:02:05 Jack

Yeah, active voice is just where the sentence has in English.

00:02:09 Jack

As you know, English is a subject, verb, object language.

00:02:12 Jack

So you have a subject that is dumb.

00:02:18 Jack

Making some sort of action which is the the verb and then acting upon something else.

00:02:26 Jack

So for example, yeah.

00:02:28 Jack

A podcast Jack Records a podcast.

00:02:31 Jack

Jack makes a sandwich.

00:02:33 Jack

Jack eats the sandwich.

00:02:35 Kevin

All right.

00:02:36 Kevin

Kevin takes a nap.

00:02:38 Jack

Yeah, Kevin takes a nap.

00:02:39 Kevin

Yeah, that's.

00:02:40 Jack

That's right.

00:02:41 Kevin

Yeah, but those are all active Thrones.

00:02:41 Jack

Kevin goes to school.

00:02:43 Jack

Yeah, those are in active sentences, right?

00:02:45 Jack

You know who the subject is, you know what the verb is, and you know what the object.

00:02:50 Kevin

Is yeah, simple, simple sentence.

00:02:52 Kevin

Is any sentence you've learned is probably that.

00:02:55 Kevin

So now?

00:02:56 Kevin

What is passive now and passive voice?

00:03:01 Kevin

Passive sentences are where you kind of we change the focus, right?

00:03:07 Kevin

So instead of focusing on the subject.

00:03:10 Kevin

Right.

00:03:11 Kevin

Kevin does this, Jack does this.

00:03:13 Kevin

The focus is more on what's being done.

00:03:16 Kevin

On on the verb exactly.

00:03:16 Jack

Right, it's the object.

00:03:18 Jack

The object and the subject are inverted.

00:03:21 Jack

But you cannot invert, you can't just, you can't just directly invert the object and this object.

00:03:28 Jack

For example, Jack ate the sandwich is not the same as the sandwich 8.

00:03:33 Jack

To Jack, that is a nightmare.

00:03:36 Jack

You know scenario where a giant sandwich is trying to eat me?

00:03:40 Kevin

Frightening example type, but amazing.

00:03:41 Jack

Does that frightening?

00:03:43 Kevin

Yeah, that's that's a very, very good point.

00:03:45 Kevin

So you're not just changing the order of the sentence, right?

00:03:48 Kevin

So the way to do.

00:03:50 Kevin

Passive sentences is we use the conjugated form of the two be verb.

00:03:56 Kevin

So is our Umm like I am or whatever so we.

00:04:01 Jack

Or past tense.

00:04:02 Jack

As well was and where it is OK to yeah.

00:04:04 Kevin

Right.

00:04:04 Kevin

And then we use the main verb is the past participle.

00:04:08 Kevin

Past participle.

00:04:09 Kevin

So instead of like, we use light to write, instead of each, we use eight things like that.

00:04:15 Kevin

Or eaten.

00:04:16 Kevin

Sorry, we use eaten.

00:04:16 Jack

Yeah. So eaten. Yeah.

00:04:19 Kevin

Right, so you know, Jack & a sandwich is active, or Jack eats a sandwich, but then if we do it as passive, it was the sandwich.

00:04:29 Kevin

Focused, right?

00:04:30 Kevin

So the sandwich was eaten by Jack.

00:04:35 Kevin

Is is going to.

00:04:36 Kevin

Be passive.

00:04:36 Jack

Or in the you could do it in the present tense.

00:04:39 Jack

If it's Jack eats the sandwich, then the the passive would be the sandwich is eaten by Jack, yeah.

00:04:46 Kevin

Right, right. So the verb just conjugates to whatever tense it is. But the, I mean, you have the 2B, so is or were or was?

00:04:55 Kevin

But then the main verb, you know, sandwich, so eats.

00:04:58 Kevin

That's always going to be the past participle.

00:05:01 Kevin

I liked loved, right?

00:05:03 Kevin

The past participle of it, yeah.

00:05:07 Kevin

I guess then just to kind of talk about it, active is just safe, right, for everybody out there listening in your writing?

00:05:14 Kevin

I remember so many times my English teachers in high school I would write something and I would use the passive tents.

00:05:22 Kevin

You know, this happened here or whatever.

00:05:26 Kevin

My teacher would circle it and then just be like active, change it to active changes active 'cause I was using it.

00:05:32 Kevin

And so they were just always telling me just like no, just active, active, active, just try and always use active.

00:05:37 Kevin

And to be safe, yes, just always use active.

00:05:40 Kevin

Keep it, keep it simple.

00:05:41 Jack

Yeah, now here's the problem.

00:05:43 Jack

Here's the rub.

00:05:44 Jack

Here's the problem.

00:05:46 Jack

What if you don't know the subject of the sentence if the subject is unknown?

00:05:51 Jack

So this is very common with newspaper articles, especially the headlines in newspapers where a crime was committed.

00:06:01 Jack

However, nobody knows who the criminal the perpetrator is.

00:06:07 Jack

So for example.

00:06:08 Kevin

Right, and that was your.

00:06:10 Kevin

You had that example already in in the passive tense.

00:06:12 Kevin

The crime was so past tense of to be and then committed.

00:06:17 Kevin

The past participle of commit, right?

00:06:19 Jack

Right, and let's use my let's use my sandwich as an example.

00:06:19 Kevin

Crime was committed.

00:06:23 Jack

So I make this wonderful sandwich and I, I, I finished my making my my beautiful sandwich and I put it on the.

00:06:32 Jack

People and then my doorbell rings.

00:06:36 Jack

So I go to the door and I opened the door and there's my friend that need.

00:06:42 Jack

My neighbour needs to talk to me.

00:06:44 Jack

We talk for 5 minutes.

00:06:46 Jack

I come back and the sandwich is gone.

00:06:49 Kevin

Oh my gosh.

00:06:50 Kevin

It's a crime.

00:06:50 Jack

Some yeah, somebody stole my sandwich or somebody ate my sandwich.

00:06:56 Jack

Well, I can stay act.

00:06:59 Jack

I can use the active voice and say somebody ate my sandwich.

00:07:03 Jack

Or I could just say, Oh no, the sandwich was eat.

00:07:09 Jack

Right, OK.

00:07:10 Jack

And what does that mean?

00:07:13 Jack

That means that somebody ate my sandwich.

00:07:16 Jack

The sandwich was eaten by somebody, but I don't know who.

00:07:21 Kevin

Yeah, and you'll like you mentioned this is passive is used a lot of times on.

00:07:27 Kevin

News in or any academic writing or any factual writing about what happened, and it really tends to remember it emphasizes the action, right?

00:07:38 Kevin

So it's the the sandwich being stolen.

00:07:40 Kevin

Then that's the focus of the sentence, not to somebody.

00:07:43 Jack

Oh, right, right.

00:07:44 Jack

Sure, sure.

00:07:45 Kevin

That that's the focus.

00:07:46 Kevin

It's like the sandwich being stolen.

00:07:47 Kevin

Oh my God, someone stole the sandwich, right?

00:07:49 Kevin

Someone robbed the bank.

00:07:50 Kevin

The bank was robbed.

00:07:52 Kevin

And that's what we're focusing on, the action of it.

00:07:55 Kevin

And that's why the news often uses passive because the news, of course, is focused on the events that are happening, like the person generally.

00:08:05 Kevin

Isn't the important part of the news, unless it's the president or some, you know, very important person doing it.

00:08:11 Kevin

The the important part of the news is what is being done, what happened and so that's where we'll use path of a lot.

00:08:19 Jack

Another place where we use it is like, yeah, exactly when the emphasis is on the object.

00:08:24 Jack

Of the sentence and.

00:08:25 Jack

Not the subject.

00:08:26 Jack

So, for example, if Kevin and I are talking about very important inventions from history and he's talking about the telephone.

00:08:39 Jack

And and I want to talk about the light bulb.

00:08:44 Jack

Maybe I'm not really concerned that Thomas Edison invented the light bulb.

00:08:49 Jack

That's an active sentence.

00:08:51 Jack

Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, but I I want to focus on the invite.

00:08:56 Jack

So I would say the light bulb was invented by Edison and I'm putting the focus of the sentence on the light bulb and but.

00:09:09 Jack

Thomas Edison is still the subject of the sentence.

00:09:13 Jack

He's still the subject, and light bulb is still the object.

00:09:17 Jack

But the object is coming first in the sentence, which goes generally against the rules of English.

00:09:21 Kevin

Right.

00:09:22 Kevin

That's the important part of it.

00:09:23 Jack

Yeah, but.

00:09:25 Kevin

Yeah, and remember off topic.

00:09:25 Jack

But we do this, so I just, you know.

00:09:27 Kevin

Remember Nicolas Tesla was a better inventor than Thomas Edison was.

00:09:30 Jack

Yeah, yeah, and and Tesla was a better inventor than than.

00:09:33 Jack

And then Edison, for sure, I agree.

00:09:36 Kevin

Yeah, but yeah, exactly.

00:09:39 Kevin

And so it's tricky, right?

00:09:41 Kevin

Like when to use these passive ones and when when.

00:09:44 Kevin

It sounds weird, but that's where you'll just have to practice, practice, practice.

00:09:49 Kevin

When to use passive, when to use active again, stick with active when you don't know, but when you're talking about news.

00:09:56 Kevin

When you're focused on the events, if you're talking about a scientific article or or something, right, then you're going to use passive more because you're focused on the event that's happening, you know so.

00:10:06 Jack

Yeah, the quick and the quick.

00:10:08 Jack

And dirty tips would be.

00:10:08 Jack 3

Yeah, good.

00:10:10 Jack

When you don't know the subject, the subject is unknown or you want to emphasize the object of the sentence.

00:10:17 Jack

Those are the two situations where I would say using the passive will make your writing and your speaking more sophisticated.

00:10:25 Jack

You'll sound more like a native speaker, but Yep.

00:10:28 Jack

Are my 3 tips.

00:10:28 Kevin

I will say as well.

00:10:29 Kevin

Well, you're talking about style, right?

00:10:31 Kevin

It definitely sounds more sophisticated, it sounds more factual, but it also sounds.

00:10:38 Kevin

It has a lot less emotion to.

00:10:41 Kevin

Because that's where they use it on the news, right?

00:10:42 Kevin

They're just stating the facts.

00:10:43 Kevin

It's just fact, fact, fact, fact, fact.

00:10:45 Kevin

And so there's no emotion, there's no feeling, just this happened, this happened, this happened.

00:10:49 Kevin

And that's why whenever you watch the news, you know, they're talking about many people dying or banks being robbed, all these terrible things happening.

00:10:56 Kevin

And it always sounds very cold because they're just reporting the events, right.

00:11:01 Kevin

The bank was robbed at 9:00 o'clock today.

00:11:05 Kevin

Many people have like have died through the coronavirus, right?

00:11:08 Kevin

They're just keeping it, keeping it passive and so keeping it very factual for.

00:11:15 Kevin

It's been a couple of other just really quick examples just to just to wrap up.

00:11:15 Jack

There you go.

00:11:20 Kevin

So I drove, I drove my mom to the airport.

00:11:21 Jack

I thought, man.

00:11:25 Kevin

OK, so I drove my mom to the airport.

00:11:28 Kevin

That's an active sentence.

00:11:29 Kevin

How would I make?

00:11:30 Jack

That passive?

00:11:31 Jack

My mom was driven to the airport by me.

00:11:36 Kevin

Right.

00:11:37 Kevin

And you can even skip the by me.

00:11:38 Kevin

Like that might not be an important part of the sentence because again, the important thing is my mom being driven to the airport.

00:11:44 Kevin

Oh yeah, my mom was driven to the airport.

00:11:46 Kevin

That's good.

00:11:46 Kevin

She didn't have to take the subway.

00:11:48 Jack

Yeah, and if you know the subject, you can use by the subject, but if you don't know the subject, just drop it, you know?

00:11:49 Kevin

That's that's the important part.

00:11:52 Jack 3

Right.

00:11:55 Jack

And if you if you don't want to use the subject, if you don't care about it, if it's not important, you can drop that too, so you don't need to buy like like Kevin said.

00:12:04 Kevin

Yeah, exactly.

00:12:06 Jack

Uh, let me see here.

00:12:07 Jack

What's the what's a fun one?

00:12:11 Kevin

One last one just to wrap up.

00:12:11 Jack

I I ate the piece of birthday cake.

00:12:18 Kevin

Jack ate the last piece of birthday cake.

00:12:20 Jack

Oh, the last piece of birthday cake.

00:12:21 Kevin

Oh no.

00:12:21 Jack

That's even better.

00:12:22 Jack

That's better.

00:12:23 Jack

OK.

00:12:24 Kevin

Yeah, so I I go into the kitchen.

00:12:26 Kevin

Jack, all of your food is being stolen.

00:12:28 Kevin

Your sandwich.

00:12:29 Kevin

They weren't that she.

00:12:29 Jack

I know.

00:12:30 Jack

Well, we have a.

00:12:31 Jack

Dog, you know, very naughty.

00:12:32 Jack

Naughty Dog.

00:12:33 Jack

Yeah, it happens.

00:12:34 Kevin

That happens, so you walk into your kitchen and the last piece of birthday cake was eaten.

00:12:39 Kevin

It's gone. It was eaten, right? So past tense was. It's the past tense of two BIM. It was. It is, right. So it was. And then past tense of eat, eaten.

00:12:51 Kevin

Or the past?

00:12:55 Jack

Past participle.

00:12:55 Kevin

Perfect.

00:12:56 Kevin

That's possible.

00:12:57 Kevin

Thank you.

00:12:58 Kevin

And yeah, it was eaten by the dog or it was just eaten because we don't know who it was.

00:13:05 Jack

Exactly. Yeah.

00:13:05 Kevin

But we're focusing on the cake disappearing, the cake being eaten.

00:13:09 Kevin

It's a crime.

00:13:10 Kevin

It's terrible.

00:13:11 Kevin

Your sandwich and your cake.

00:13:13 Jack

Jack and Kevin released the podcast.

00:13:18 Kevin

So the podcast was released.

00:13:21 Kevin

Done or the podcast was released by Jack and Kevin, but again, the emphasis is not on Jack and Kevin.

00:13:27 Kevin

We're not important in the second one.

00:13:28 Kevin

The podcast is important in this.

00:13:30 Jack

There you go.

00:13:31 Kevin

So all of everyone out there listened to our podcast.

00:13:35 Kevin

Thank you very much.

00:13:36 Kevin

And our podcast was listened to by many people.

00:13:40 Jack

There you go.

00:13:41 Kevin

So again, everybody who's listening, thanks for tuning in.

00:13:45 Kevin

Remember you can check our web page for, you know, show notes and information and some examples for this.

00:13:50 Kevin

But try for yourself.

00:13:51 Kevin

Put some sentences in the active.

00:13:53 Kevin

Just say something.

00:13:55 Kevin

What happened?

00:13:56 Kevin

What is something that you or your friend or your mom or?

00:13:58 Kevin

Dad or your dog did.

00:14:00 Kevin

And then change it to passive and see how that changes the meaning and the feeling behind it.

00:14:06 Kevin

The emphasis is on the action being done, not on the person or thing doing the action.

00:14:13 Jack

There you go.

00:14:14 Kevin

Alright, well thanks everybody for for listening.

00:14:17 Kevin

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Have a fantastic week and I will see you here or we'll see you in our WhatsApp group to join in and give us some examples.

00:14:23 Kevin

There have a great one.

00:14:25 Jack

Bye, bye.