

English B1 · The passive

Intermediate English for Chinese speakers; classroom examples, not official exam items.

The spotlight swap

The passive is a spotlight swap: the actor steps back into the dark, and the object steps into the light.

be changes; the participle doesn't

Tense	Passive	Example
present simple	is/are + participle	English is spoken here.
past simple	was/were + participle	The bridge was built in 1990.
present perfect	has been + participle	My phone has been stolen!
future / modal	will be / must be + participle	Homework must be finished on time.

Use the evidence

be does all the tense work; the participle just sits there, being done to.

Your turn: tense the be

Your turn

The results ____ (announce) tomorrow.

- A. announced
- B. will announce
- C. will be announced
- D. are announcing

by, or silence

by names the actor

The homework was eaten by the cat.

Use it when the actor matters.

silence skips the actor

My bike was stolen. — unknown

He was arrested. — by the police,
obviously

Your turn: actor or silence

Your turn

My bike ____ (steal) yesterday. I have no idea who did it.

- A. stole
- B. was stolen
- C. was stolen by someone
- D. stolen

Where the passive lives

Home	Example
rules and signs	English is spoken here. Bikes must not be parked here.
science and news	The experiment was repeated three times.
formal writing	Two pandas were born in Chengdu.

Use the evidence

Chinese uses its bèi passive rarely and often for bad news; English uses it neutrally and constantly.

Your turn: the licence check

Your turn

Which is correct?

- ☐ A. It was happened yesterday.
- ☐ B. It happened yesterday.
- ☐ C. It is happened yesterday.
- ☐ D. It was happen yesterday.

Say it aloud

Report the classroom news: The homework was eaten by the cat.

The investigation: The cat has been interviewed. No comment was given.

The announcements: The results will be announced tomorrow.

The mood: Fear is being felt. Progress is celebrated.

Check yourself

- The bridge was built in 1990. — was plus participle.
- My phone has been stolen! — a fresh disaster in the perfect passive.
- Homework must be finished on time. — modal plus be plus participle.
- It happened yesterday. — no object, no passive licence.