

PASSIVE VOICE

Voice is a form of a verb that determines the relationship between the subject and the action of the verb: specifically whether the subject is performing the action, receiving the action, or something in between. The two most important voices are the active and the passive.

The active voice is where the subject performs the action or is in the state communicated by the verb. This is the most common voice in both English and Latin.

Consider the following examples:

Vir cultrum accipit. ("The man takes the knife.")

Feminae ex oppido abeunt. ("The women go out of the city.")

The passive voice is where the subject receives the action communicated by the verb. In English, it is usually necessary to use a helping verb such as "is", "are", "be", or "been" to form a passive verb: for example, "is led", "be seen", "have been killed", etc. In Latin, it is formed by adding passive endings to the verb stem. For the singular indicative, the passive ending is *(i)tur*; for the plural, it is *(u)ntur*.

As in active endings, the variable vowels "i" and "u" in the passive endings will remain or drop out depending on the last letter of the vowel stem. For consonant-stem verbs, the variable vowels remain: for example, *ponitur, ponuntur, ducitur, ducuntur*. For a- and e-stem verbs, the variable vowels always drop out: for example, *aedificatur, aedificantur, videtur, videntur*. For (i)- and i-stem verbs, the variable vowel "i" drops out of the singular, but the "u" remains in the plural: for example, *accipitur, accipiuntur, auditur, audiuntur*.

Keep in mind that not every verb may be formed in the passive. Verbs that do not take direct objects (called intransitive verbs) may not be formed in the passive voice. For example, "laugh" in English is intransitive. Thus, it cannot grammatically take a direct object ("He laughs my jokes"). Likewise, it may not be grammatically formed in the passive: "My jokes are laughed". However, the word "mock" is transitive and may take a direct object: "They mock his clothing." Likewise, it may be formed in the passive: "His clothing is mocked."

Both English and Latin have many intransitive verbs. Generally, they fall into three categories: 1) Verbs that express a state of being, such as "is", "sit", "lie", "sleep", "blush", etc; 2) Verbs that express motion, such as "go", "rise", "fall", "gallop", "limp", etc; or self-contained action, such as "laugh", "frown", "glow", etc. It is not particularly important why a verb is intransitive, but it is important to be able to recognize one. If in doubt, try adding a sensible direct object to the verb. If it cannot be done, it is intransitive and cannot be put in the passive voice.