

ACCELERATE
ENGLISH

GRAMMAR SERIES

GRAMMAR ESSENTIALS

50 LESSONS

THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS IN
ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Dear English Learners,

Firstly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to help you improve your English. I am delighted to have the privilege of being your teacher, and I hope that my book can give you a better understanding of English, as well as answering some of your questions and correcting some of your common mistakes.

As you may have read on my website, I started writing my first English learning book in 2012. At that time, it was just one book that included many different types of lessons, and since then I've divided it into three groups as part of my grammar series: "Grammar Essentials", "What's the Difference Between...?", and "Stop Saying That!" While you are reading some of the lessons in this book, you may see references to these other books, so if you have these other books too, you can quickly and easily find the information you need to learn more about a specific topic.

Since 2012, I have been adapting and improving these books based on the mistakes that I hear most often in the classroom and the questions that I receive most often from students in order to try and produce a book that can best meet your English needs even if I have never met you!

It's important to note that English is constantly evolving, and many versions of English exist all over the world. It's possible that in some cases, the type of language or grammar that is used in England can be different than the type of English that is used in United States, for example. This book has been written from an American/Canadian English perspective, which is the English in American movies, pop songs, and media. Studies have shown that American English has become more common internationally than British English, so the lessons in this book should be useful in your future English interactions with people all over the world.

I hope that you enjoy this book and that it can help you achieve your goal of improving your English so that you can confidently and correctly communicate with the world.

Sincerely,



Blake Howe
Accelerate English

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Passive Form

There are several situations when passive form is used, and therefore, students need to understand how to use it. Students often prefer to use active form, because they are familiar with it and it is easier to use, but this can sound unnatural in certain situations or with certain verbs.

Past Participles

In order to make passive form, both the “be” verb and past participles are very important. A past participle with “be” is similar to an adjective with “be”, because in both cases, the subject isn’t actually doing anything.

For example, when you use the “be” verb and an adjective to describe a baby or a car: “*the baby is tired*” or “*the car is new*”, then the baby and the car are not doing anything. The adjectives “*tired*” and “*new*” are used with “be” just to describe the state of the baby and the car. The only active verb in this case is the “be” verb (“*the baby is*” and “*the car is*”), so the only action that the baby and car are doing is *being/existing*.

When you want to use a verb word instead of an adjective to describe the state of a noun that is not actively doing anything, you can change the verb word into a past participle and combine it with “be”, like an adjective.

For example, if you want to describe “*the art*” with the verb “*steal*”, or “*the building*” with the verb “*see*”, you can change the verbs into the past participle form “*stolen*” and “*seen*”, and add the “be” verb with them:

- *The art was stolen from the museum.*
- *The building can be seen from anywhere in the city.*

In the examples above, the only action that the subjects (“*the art*” and “*the building*”) are performing is the “be” verb: “*the art was*” / “*the building can be*”, which just means that these nouns exist. These two nouns are *not* performing the action “*steal*” or “*see*”, because “art” doesn’t have hands, so it cannot “steal”, and a building doesn’t have eyes, so it cannot “see”. Using “be” and the past participle together (“*was stolen*” and “*be seen*”) can tell us that these nouns did *not* perform these actions.

This is similar to adjective form, because if you say: “*the art is beautiful*” or “*the building is tall*”, the art and building are not performing any action, they are only “existing”, because of the “be” verb. The words “*beautiful*” and “*tall*” with “be” describe these nouns in adjective form in the same way that the past participles “*stolen*” and “*seen*” with “be” describe these nouns in passive form. You can see another comparison below:

- *The food was cold.* – the adjective “cold” describes the food; the only action that the food performs is “be” (“was”)
The food was frozen. – the past participle “frozen” describes the food; the only action that the food performs is “be” (“was”)
- *The trip was enjoyable for everyone.* – the adjective “enjoyable” describes “the trip”; the trip only did the action “was”
The trip was enjoyed by everyone. – the past participle “enjoyed” describes “the trip”; the trip only did the action “was”

In the examples above, the noun “*the food*” is not performing the verb “*freeze*” and the noun “*the trip*” is not performing the verb “*enjoy*”, so the past participles are used. Remember that if you use passive form because a subject is *not* performing the verb action, you need to change the verb into a past participle and use “be”.

How to Create Passive Form

Many past participles verbs look the same as the past base form verb. For example, the word “*taught*” is both the past base form and the past participle for the verb “*teach*”, but we can recognize which one it is by seeing if the “be” verb is used with it:

- When you add “be”, we know that “*taught*” is a past participle, so it means that the subject is *not* performing the “*teach*” action: “*I was taught physics in high school*” (I was a student).
- If the “be” verb is *not* included with “*taught*”, we know it’s past simple, so the subject *performed* the “*teach*” action: “*my father taught physics in high school*” (my father was a teacher).

Passive form requires these two important pieces: the “be” verb in some form (*am, is, are, was, were, being, to be, been, be*) and a past participle. If one of these two pieces is missing, it’s not passive form. By looking for these two necessary pieces, identify the two examples below that are *not* passive:

- a) *The problem has been fixed.*
- b) *She has been helping me a lot.*
- c) *All of the children were given gifts.*
- d) *My car is being repaired today.*
- e) *The party ended around 2am.*

Example b) is in active form, and it’s in present perfect continuous tense. It is not passive because there is no past participle after the “be” verb. The passive form would be: “*she has been helped.*” The active form “*she has been helping*” means that the woman is *giving* help, not receiving it.

Example e) is also in active form because there is no “be” verb, so the verb “*ended*” is in past base form. This means that “the party” performed the verb “*end*”, and the tense is past simple.

Examples a), c), and d) are in passive form, because they all have the “be” verb with a past participle (“*been fixed*”, “*were given*”, and “*being repaired*”).

Complete exercise 1 in the practice book, and then return here to continue reading this lesson

One way to check if your form is correct is to remember that you can only put a noun directly before a regular base form verb if the noun can perform that verb/action. If the noun *cannot* perform the action, then it is *receiving* the action, which means passive form is necessary. You can write “*the bridge was built*”, because a bridge can receive the action “*build*”, but you cannot write “*the bridge built*” because a bridge cannot perform the action “*build*”.

Determine which example below is in correct passive form:

- a) *The whole pizza ate*
- b) *The whole pizza eating*
- c) *The whole pizza was ate*
- d) *The whole pizza was eaten*
- e) *The whole pizza was eating*

The only correct example is example d). The noun “*pizza*” cannot perform the action of “*eat*”, so if you use the noun “*pizza*” as a subject with this verb, you need the “be” verb and the past participle to express that the pizza is *receiving* the action of “*eat*”: “*the whole pizza was eaten.*”

Complete exercises 2 and 3 in the practice book, and then return here to continue reading this lesson

There are some verbs that are often used in passive form, because the object of these verbs is usually more important than the subject including: *based, arrested, shot, born, established, located, and called*.

There are also some verbs that are *not* used in passive form, because there is no object with them, or *rarely* used in passive form, including: *happen, increase, decrease, appear, depend, and exist*.

As you have already learned, passive in positive form involves the “be” verb and a past participle:

- *The missing keys were found / His book was published / The broken door has been repaired*

If you want to make passive form become negative, add the word “*not*” after the “be” verb, or you can contract it into “*isn’t*”, “*aren’t*” etc.

- *Cigarettes aren’t advertised anymore / The driver wasn’t arrested / They weren’t given any advice*

If you want to change passive form into a question move the “be” verb in front of the subject:

- *Are cigarettes advertised anymore? / Was the driver arrested? / Were they given any advice?*

Complete exercises 4, 5, and 6 in the practice book, and then return here to continue reading this lesson

Until now, only present simple and past simple examples of passive have been used, because they are easier to understand. However, passive form can be used in many tenses, and these tenses can be more complicated, because the “be” verb for passive will change into a different form, such as “being” or “been”:

a) Passive Continuous Tense:

Both continuous tense and passive use the “be” verb, so you need to use “be” twice in this form. The first “be” is for continuous tense (*is/are/was/were*), and the second “be” is for passive form (*being*):

Present: *am/is/are + (-ing) = am/is/are + being*

- *She is being arrested by the police.*

Past: *was/were + (-ing) = was/were + being*

- *My computer was being repaired.*

b) Passive Perfect Tense:

The “have” verb is for perfect tense, and “been” is for passive form:

Present: *has/have + past participle = has/have + been*

- *The website has been viewed 1,000 times.*

Past: *had + past participle = had + been*

- *He opened the package that had been delivered.*

c) Modal + Passive Verb:

A modal can only connect with a present base form verb. If you are using a modal to describe something in the present or future, use the present base form “be” and the past participle. On the other hand, if you are using a modal to describe something in the past, use present perfect with “been” as the past participle:

Present: *modal + present base form = must/should/can/could/will/would/might/may + be*

- *Tickets can be reserved in advance.*

Past: *modal + present perfect = must/should/could/would/might/may + have been*

- *The money must have been stolen.*

d) Main Verb + Passive Verb:

A regular main verb can connect with a passive verb by using “be” in either infinitive or gerund form, depending on which type of verb the main verb uses. For example, the verb “need” connects with an infinitive verb, so it becomes “need to be”, while the verb “avoid” connects with a gerund, so it becomes “avoid being”. In chapter 23, you will learn which verbs connect with infinitives and which ones connect with gerunds.

Verbs with an infinitive = **(verb) to be**

- *I want to be hired by a good company.*

Verbs with a gerund = **(verb) being**

- *Employees like being recognized for their hard work.*

In all of the examples above, a past participle is used at the end of the verb phrase because the noun in the subject position is *receiving* the action, not performing it (ex. “arrested”, “repaired”, “viewed”, “delivered”, “reserved”, “stolen”, “hired”, “recognized”).

You cannot use the gerund/present participle form (-ing) for these verbs because that means that the noun is performing the action, which is incorrect. The only verb that can be in “-ing” form for passive is the “be” verb for present continuous and past continuous tense (“being”), because this means that the subject is existing, but not performing any real action.

Complete exercise 7 in the practice book, and then return here to continue reading this lesson

When to Use Passive Form

We use passive when we decide that the object of the verb should get more attention than the subject of the verb, so the subject is removed (or added at the end with the preposition “by”) and the object moves to the subject position (the front) in the clause. The most common reasons for using passive are described below:

- a) Use passive when the subject is very general and has little meaning like “*someone*” or “*people*”. These nouns don’t have much meaning, so it is sometimes better to remove this noun and use passive form to focus more on the object instead:

- *My car was stolen.* – this is better than active form: “*someone stole my car*”
- *This picture was taken on my birthday.* – this is better than active form: “*a person took this picture on my birthday*”

- b) Use passive when the subject is obvious, so it’s unnecessary to mention it. In this case, the object is often more interesting or useful information, so it becomes the subject.

- *I was born in 1983.* – only your mother can do the action of “bear”, so we use passive form and put the child as the subject
- *He was arrested for murder.* – only the police can do the action of “arrest”, so it’s unnecessary to mention them

- c) Use passive when the object is more important than the subject in a specific context. This is usually because the focus is on a specific topic, and if this topic is the object of a verb, it’s better to put it in the subject position to keep the attention focused on this topic.

For example, if you are focusing on the product “*makeup*” and you want to use the verb “*wear*”, it’s better to use passive and say: “*makeup is worn by women*” then “*women wear makeup*” because the focus is on “*makeup*”, not “*women*”.

- *Howard Schultz established Starbucks in Seattle.* – in active form if the topic is the businessman Howard Schultz
- *Starbucks was established in Seattle.* – in passive if the topic is the company Starbucks
- *Mark David Chapman killed John Lennon in 1980.* – in active if the topic is the killer Mark David Chapman
- *John Lennon was killed in 1980.* – in passive, which is more natural because John Lennon is more important in this case

- d) Use passive to be more formal, especially in written announcements and public statements. Pronouns in the subject position, such as “*I*”, “*we*” or “*they*”, are removed and the object moves to the subject position.

- *We have made a decision about the new policy.* – active form; this is a common way of writing a clause
- *A decision has been made about the new policy.* – passive form; this is more formal by removing the subject “*we*”
- *I researched five companies for this report.* – active and more common
- *Five companies were researched for this report.* – passive and more formal by removing the personal pronoun “*I*”

- e) Use passive when you don’t want to say who performed an action. For example, if you want to protect someone’s identity or if you think that adding the person will put too much negative focus on that person.

- *Jenny told me that you are angry with me.* → *I was told that you’re angry with me.*
- *Mark made a mistake, so we have to fix it.* → *A mistake was made so we have to fix it.*
- *You have to wear your uniform every day.* → *Uniforms have to be worn every day.*

- f) when you want to keep the same subject instead of introducing a new unnecessary subject. If the subject of the clause is the object of a verb later in the clause, you can change the verb to passive to avoid adding a new subject. This is more common with conjunctions that don’t require you to repeat the subject (*and*, *but*, *or*).

- *I called the customer service number and a man told me I could get a refund.* – “*a man*” is not important
- *I called the customer service number and was told I could get a refund.* – this keeps the subject as “*I*”
- *The President was elected in 1998 and the people impeached him in 2001.* – “*the people*” is unnecessary
- *The President was elected in 1998 and was impeached in 2001.* – this keeps the subject as “*the President*”

- g) Use passive when you use the verb “call” for names of places, the verb “spell” to describe how to spell a word, and the verb “pronounce” to describe pronunciation. With these verbs, it’s more common to focus on the word you are talking about by using the pronoun “it” in the subject position.
- *I saw a good movie last night. It’s called “Inception”. Have you seen it?*
 - *Her name is Tugce. It’s pronounced “Too-chay”.*
 - *The online movie service is called Netflix. It’s spelled N-E-T-F-L-I-X.*

Complete the remaining exercises for this lesson in the practice book

Key Words and Concepts

- **Passive Form:** when the “be” verb is used with a past participle to communicate that the word in the subject position does *not* perform the verb action, such as “*the car was sold*” (the car didn’t do the verb “sell”). Passive can be used in continuous and perfect tenses as well, such as “*the car has been sold*”.
- Every form of passive will involve the “be” verb and a past participle after it: “*it is being repaired*”, “*it was repaired*”, “*it will be repaired*”, “*it has been repaired*” etc.
- Passive is used to put more focus on the object than the subject by putting the object first and removing the subject (or including it later with the preposition “by”).

Gerunds as Subjects

Every sentence has a subject, and the subject of a sentence needs to be a noun, but sometimes we want to put a verb word in the subject position, so it needs to become a noun. As you already know, if we want to make a verb become a noun, we put it in the gerund (-ing) form.

Sometimes we want to put a verb as the focus of a clause, which means it should be the subject of the clause. However, only nouns can be subjects, not verbs, so a verb needs to be changed into gerund form and then it can become the subject and the focus point of the clause.

For example, you can say “*I learn English and it is difficult*”, but it sounds awkward because it is two very short clauses connected by “and”. This can be expressed in a simpler way by changing it into one clause if you remove the pronoun “I” and make the subject the gerund phrase “*Learning English*”:

- *Learning English is difficult.*

Some students ask about using the infinitive form of a verb, such as “*to learn*”, as the subject. This is very uncommon, because putting an infinitive verb in the subject position sounds too philosophical. Using a gerund sounds more like you are talking about the real action and not just the concept of the action:

- *Exercising and eating healthy food are necessary steps in order to lose weight.*
- *Traveling around the world would be an amazing experience.*
- *Driving in the city is more stressful than driving in my hometown.*

When you use a gerund as a subject, it is considered singular, which means that the verb needs to be in singular form too (ex. “*is*”, “*has*”, “*causes*”). For example, the noun “*writing tests*” looks plural because of “*tests*”, but the subject is actually the noun “*writing*”, which is singular, so the verb with it (“*is*”) is also in singular form:

- *Writing tests is a traditional way of evaluating students’ progress.*
- *Managing employees requires a lot of interpersonal skills.*
- *Raising taxes helps the government increase their income.*

It’s uncommon to add a person before the gerund in the subject position, because gerund subjects are usually general statements, like in the examples above. However, if the gerund needs to be described personally, it can be understood through other ways, such as adding “*my*” to the gerund for possession: “*my writing is improving.*”

You can also add the prepositional phrase “*for me*” into the clause to introduce the statement as an opinion or personal statement: “*(for me), studying is more enjoyable (for me) than working.*”

Although it’s not common, you can add a noun before a gerund in the subject position: “*employees quitting has been a big problem for our company recently.*” If you want to add a personal pronoun, it should be an *object* pronoun (“*him*”, “*us*”, “*them*” etc.), because the subject pronouns can only connect to base form verbs:

- *I remember saying goodbye to my parents at the airport. Them waving goodbye to me made me cry.*
- *The cat jumping on Mark’s head was the funniest thing ever. Him screaming in fear was hilarious.*
- *I’m proud of my daughter, because her graduating from university was a big accomplishment.*

In the third example above, the conjunction “*because*” starts a new clause with a new subject and a new verb, so the subject of the second clause is “*her graduating from university*” and the verb is the past base form “*was*”.

Some other important points related to creating gerund subjects are given below:

- Use “*not*” for negative form: *Not having a job affects my lifestyle, because I can’t spend much money.*
- Use “*being*” with adjectives: *Being late makes a bad impression on people.*
- Use “*being able to*” instead of “*can*” for ability: *Being able to speak English will help me get a better job.*
- Use “*having to*” for obligation: *Having to wake up early every day for work is really difficult.*
- Use “*would*” with the main verb if the situation is being imagined: *Living on the moon would be lonely.*

Complete exercise 1 in the practice book, and then return here to continue reading this lesson

Another important point to mention is that gerunds are not only used at the start of a sentence but can also be used at the start of any new clause in the middle of a sentence. When conjunctions (*but, so, because, if, that*, etc.) are used, it means that a new clause is starting, and if a verb word is the subject of this new clause it also needs to be a gerund:

- *Speaking English is hard for me, but writing is easy.*
- *There is usually a lot of traffic on the highways, so taking a train is a better option.*
- *Some couples decide not to have children, because raising children can be very expensive.*
- *If a person is religious, going to church is usually important to them.*
- *I discovered that dancing salsa is a lot of fun.*

Complete the remaining exercises for this lesson in the practice book

Key Words and Concepts

- If a verb word is used as the subject of a clause, it needs to be in gerund form. This is true for any clause in a sentence, not only the first one. If a verb word is used after a conjunction to be the subject of a new clause, it also needs to be in gerund form.