

Unit 42

Passive (1) (be done / have been done)

a *Active and passive.* Study this example:



This house **was built** in 1895.

This is a *passive* sentence. Compare:

Somebody **built** this house in 1995. (*active*)

This house **was built** in 1895. (*passive*)

We often prefer the passive when it is not so important who or what did the action. In this example, it is not so important who built the house.

use **by**:

- This house was built **by my grandfather**. (= my grandfather built it)
- Have you ever been bitten **by a dog**? (= Has a dog ever bitten you?)

b In passive sentences we use the correct form of **be** (*is/are/were/has been* etc.) + the *past participle*:

(be) done (be) cleaned (be) damaged (be) built (be) seen

For irregular past participles (*done/seen/written* etc.) see **Appendix 2**.
For the passive of the present and past tenses see **Unit 43**.

c The *passive infinitive* is **be done/be cleaned/be built** etc. We use the infinitive after modal verbs (*will, can, must* etc.) and a number of other verbs (for example: *have to, be going to, want to*). Compare:

Active: We **can solve** this problem.

Passive: This problem **can be solved**.

- George **might be sent** to America by his company in August.
- The music at the party was very loud and **could be heard** from far away.
- This room **is going to be painted** next week.
- Go away! I **want to be left** alone.

There is a *past infinitive* form: **have been done/have been cleaned/have been built** etc.:

Active: Somebody **should have cleaned** the windows yesterday.

Passive: The windows **should have been cleaned** yesterday.

- My bicycle has disappeared. It **must have been stolen**.
- She **wouldn't have been injured** if she had been wearing a seat-belt.
- The weather was awful. The football match **ought to have been cancelled**.

Active: We **can solve** this problem.