
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Grammar Gameshow

Present and past passives

Will

Hello and welcome to today's Grammar Gameshow! I'm your host, Will! It's a short 'I'... less like 'sheep', and more like 'ship'. And of course, let's not forget Leslie, our all-knowing voice in the sky.

Leslie

Hello everyone!

Will

Tonight we're going to ask you three questions about...

Leslie

Present and past passives. That whodunnit verb form that's made with 'be' and a past participle.

Will

OK! Now, let's meet our contestants!

Selene

Hello all. My name's Selene.

Will

And contestant number two? Contestant number two? Oh dear, it seems...

Mark

Hello, everyone! My name is Mark.

Selene

Mark! You came back!

Mark

Of course! What is a herd of stampeding elephants compared to true love?

Will

Wow! Mark! This is a first! Welcome back! We really need to feed the elephants less. Still... respect!

Mark

Thanks, Will. I'll never let us be separated again, my love.

Selene

Nor I, my... elephant man.

Will

Awww... isn't that cute? I'll tell you what. If you can both get through the episode without making a single mistake, I'll let you both go together.

Mark

Really? Ok! Let's do it!

Will

OK. Our first round is a quick-fire round. Change these sentences into present or past passives. Someone stole our car.

Selene

Our car was stolen.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

People use buses every day.

Mark

Buses are used every day.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

I peeled and sliced the onion.

Selene

The onion was peeled and sliced.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Selene loves Mark.

Mark

Mark is loved by Selene.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Tell them Leslie!

Leslie

The passive verb form is made using 'be' and a past participle verb. The object of the active sentence is moved to the subject position and the verb is transformed. The tense applies to the 'be' verb: 'are' or 'is' for present, and 'was' or 'were' for past!

Will

Good job, lovebirds! Have 20 points! On to our next question. We use the passive form for many reasons. Here are a few of them, but one of them is incorrect. Which one is it?

The action or object is more important than the subject.

We do not know who did the action.

The person who did the action is obvious.

The action or object is hypothetical or unreal.

Selene and Mark

... mutter... mutter...

Will

I'm going to have to hurry you.

Selene

Trust me.

Mark

To the end of Earth and back.

Selene

The answer is D.

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Correct! The passive verb form is only used for specific reasons, mostly concerning how the speaker views the object and subject. If they consider the object or action to be more important than the subject, or if the subject is unknown, or obvious, they are more likely to use a passive structure. Well done, lovebirds.

Will

Alright! Control yourselves! Three points to both of you. One more right answer, and you can leave together! Here we go. When using the passive, we may wish to include the person doing the action. This subject is known as the 'agent', but which preposition do we use to introduce them?

Selene

We use 'by'. For example: My heart was captured by Mark.

Will

Correct! But it's not over yet! Sometimes we also include the object that was used to perform the action. This is known as the 'instrument'. Which preposition introduces it?

Selene

I don't know!

Mark

Nor do I. I'm sorry... we're not going to make it.

Selene

But at least we'll be together!

Will

How touching. I can't let you drop like that! Look...

Selene

With! The instrument is introduced using 'with'. The door was unlocked with a key!

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

That's right! In a passive, if you wish to introduce the person doing the action, we use 'by'. To introduce a tool that they have used, we use 'with' For example: The elephants were defeated by Mark with his bare hands. What a man.

Will

Indeed, Leslie! Well done both of you. That brings us to the end of today's Grammar Gameshow. You've passed. Here's what you've won!

Leslie

It's an unmatched set of wedding rings!

Will

I know something about love. Yes... in all the cafes, in all the worlds, she had to walk into mine... but that was such a long time ago. Go on. Go with our blessing. Go on. Hurry up. We will drop you. It looks like we'll need two more contestants. Well... we'll see you again next week when...

Levington

I made it! I'm alive!

Will

Levington! You too? We've really got to grease that tube! How do you feel?

Levington

I feel invincibl...

Will

Sorry! We can only help one person a day... today wasn't yours. Loose the bats! Thanks for joining us. Say goodbye, Leslie.

Leslie

Zàijjàn Leslie

Will

See you next time.