

83 The passive



What about this wedding dress? It **was designed** by Sara O'Neill.

Yes, it's lovely.

1 Forming the passive

We use a form of *be* + past participle (► page 348–350) of the verb. The object of the active verb becomes the subject of the passive verb:

active verb + object

subject + passive verb

They **buy** their clothes in the sales.

Their clothes **are bought** in the sales.

We don't usually repeat the same subject and form of *be* in a sentence:

The cars are taken to the port, [the cars are] **loaded** onto ships and [they are] **sent** to their destinations.

	ACTIVE	PASSIVE
simple tenses	<i>They import all the clothes from China. Did Fabio design her dress?</i>	<i>All the clothes are imported from China. Was her dress designed by Fabio?</i>
continuous tenses	<i>Somebody's washing her jeans. They weren't selling those designs last year.</i>	<i>Her jeans are being washed. Those designs weren't being sold last year.</i>
perfect tenses	<i>I haven't ironed your shirt yet. People had seen that design before.</i>	<i>Your shirt hasn't been ironed yet. That design had been seen before.</i>
will and infinitives	<i>They will post the results tomorrow. We need to repair your shoes. I'm not going to finish the report today.</i>	<i>The results will be posted tomorrow. Your shoes need to be repaired. The report isn't going to be finished today.</i>
-ing forms	<i>I hate people shouting at me.</i>	<i>I hate being shouted at.</i>

More on passive infinitives and -ing forms ► Units 64.1, 65.2, 75.3 and 76.1

NATURAL ENGLISH In spoken and informal written English, we sometimes use a form of *get* instead of *be* to form the passive. We can only do this to describe actions, not states:

*What happened? Did he **get beaten up**? We **got stuck** in the lift for an hour!*

Other uses of *get*, e.g. *get married* ► Unit 92.3

If we want to say who or what does an action when using a passive verb, we use *by* + noun. We usually put this at the end of the clause or sentence:

*Katie Holmes' wedding dress was designed by **Giorgio Armani**.*

*Did you buy that sweater from a shop or was it knitted **by your mother**?*

⚠ Verbs with no object (intransitive verbs, e.g. *arrive, come, grow up, happen, wait*) cannot be made passive:

~~*X I was grown up in Edinburgh.*~~ ✓ *I grew up in Edinburgh.*

~~*X An email has been arrived.*~~ ✓ *An email has arrived.*

Born is always passive:

*I was **born** in 1990. Where **were** your parents **born**?*