2 Reasons for using the passive

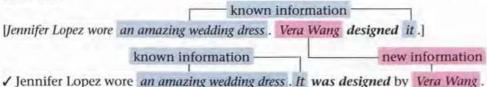
We often use the passive when we want to talk about an action rather than the person or thing that does the action. We do this when

- it doesn't matter who does the action:
 The votes will be counted at the end of the meeting.
 Have the parcels been delivered?
- we know or can guess who does the action:
 Here's your skirt. It's been dry-cleaned. (obviously by the dry cleaner's)
 I brought my car to your garage yesterday. Has it been repaired yet? (by the garage)
- we don't know, or we don't want to say who does the action:
 My bicycle has been stolen! (I don't know who stole it.)
 I see the washing-up hasn't been done again! (I don't want to say who hasn't done it.)
- we want to talk about general feelings or beliefs (➤ Unit 86):
 The building is believed to date from the thirteenth century. (Most people believe this.)
- we want to be polite or we are in a formal situation:
 Have the reports been typed yet? (more polite than Have you typed the reports yet?)
 Your application will be assessed by the manager. (more formal than The manager will assess your application.)

3 Using passives in writing

Passives are more common in writing than in speech.

 We usually prefer to start a sentence with known information (something that has already been mentioned) and then put new information at the end. The passive helps us to do this:



 We generally don't like to put a long subject before the verb, so we often use the passive to move the subject towards the end of the sentence, after the verb:

[The low prices on a selection of summer suits in the shop window attracted us.]

✓ We were attracted by the low prices on a selection of summer suits in the shop window.

More on the use of passives in writing ➤ Units 103 and 105.2

4 Common uses of the passive

We often use the passive in these situations:

news reports	Three men have been arrested by the police. The missing child has not been seen for three days. The results were announced early this morning.
academic and scientific writing	Three possibilities have been suggested and these will be examined in Chapter 3. The crystals were heated to a temperature of 150°.
instructions and rules	This plant needs to be watered daily. The doors are locked at 10.30 p.m.
describing methods, ways of working	Staff expenses are recorded on form SE11 and supported by receipts. The employees are paid monthly by cheque.