Guide to using passive voice

Passive voice means using the verb “be” with the past participle of a verb. Here are two examples:

This chair is made of wood. (not “from wood”) Containers are inspected in customs every day.

For a complete explanation of passive voice, refer to an instructional grammar book.

A) How do you know when to use passive voice? It’s a question of focus and what is practical. Each instance in which you decide whether to use or not use passive voice is different. Here are a few general guidelines.

1) We don’t know who does the action.
2) We want to draw attention away from the person who does the action.
3) The receiver of the action is more important than who or what does the action.
4) It is not important who does the action.
5) Many people perform a particular action regularly.
6) It is not important to name any person who does the action because many people who do it, regularly or not.

B) Read and search for examples of passive voice. Change some of the active voice sentences to passive voice. Talk about whether or not it makes sense or could make sense to use passive voice.

C) Use passive with causatives: have your car repaired, have your hair cut, get the copy machine fixed.

D) Passive sentences occur when writing or speaking about natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes.

destroyed by knocked down by flooded by devastated by damaged by

E) People use passive voice to talk about what people are allowed to do or not allowed to do. Use “allowed”, “permitted” and “prohibited”.

F) These verbs are commonly used with passive voice. They are past participles. Context helps you discover or think of examples. Sometimes it makes sense to use “by” with passive voice, and sometimes it does not.

1. accused of 19. interviewed 37. recorded
2. assassinated 20. invented 38. relieved
3. bought and sold 21. invited 39. robbed
4. built by 22. killed murdered 40. run over
5. caught 23. made from 41. set up
6. caused by 24. made in 42. shipped
7. cheated 25. made of 43. smuggled
8. deported 26. manufactured 44. soaked
9. designed 27. motivated 45. sold here
10. directed 28. mugged 46. stolen
11. discovered 29. offended 47. taken advantage of
12. driven 30. owned and operated by 48. taken to the airport
13. exported 31. painted by 49. thought to be
14. framed 32. parked 50. towed
15. funded by 33. produced 51. treated for (injuries)
16. grown 34. published 52. used for
17. imported 35. questioned 53. witnessed by
18. insulated 36. questioned 54. written