

Passive

— DAS PASSIV

The German passive is the structure where the subject undergoes the action instead of doing it: werden + Partizip II.

“Das Buch wird gelesen” — who is reading? Nobody says. English does this too (“mistakes were made”); German turns it into a fully worked-out system.

CONTENTS

- 01 The doer disappears, the object steps forward 02 You already do this in English
- 03 Tenses: one table, six rows 04 State passive: the difference between wird and ist
- 05 What nobody tells you: escaping with man, and the subjectless passive 06 What to do this week
- 07 Test yourself

01 00:10

The doer disappears, the object steps forward



SHORTCUT

The **Akkusativ** object of the active sentence becomes the **subject** of the passive. The verb turns into **werden** + Partizip II. The person doing it either vanishes or comes back with **von**.

VOICE	SENTENCE	ENGLISH
Active	Der Mechaniker repariert <i>das Auto</i> .	The mechanic is repairing the car .
Passive	<i>Das Auto</i> wird repariert .	The car is being repaired .
Passive + doer	<i>Das Auto</i> wird vom Mechaniker repariert .	The car is being repaired by the mechanic .

Note: **das Auto** was the **object** in the active sentence and became the **subject** in the passive. That is why a verb needs an **Akkusativ object** to be turned into a passive — verbs without one (**schlafen** · **gehen** · **bleiben**) cannot form a normal passive.

02 01:20

You already do this in English

English builds the passive with **be + past participle**, and you do it without thinking: *written · opened · being made · said*. The difference: English has one little word for the doer, *by*. German has **two**, and the choice is not optional.

ENGLISH	GERMAN	EXTRA INFO
The letter was written .	Der Brief wurde geschrieben .	no doer
The letter was written by the boss .	Der Brief wurde vom Chef geschrieben .	von + Dativ = a person
The house was destroyed by the storm .	Das Haus wurde durch den Sturm zerstört .	durch + Akkusativ = cause / means

English “by” hides this split, so it gets skipped: **if a conscious doer is involved, use von; if it is a cause or a means, use durch**. With natural events both are correct: **vom Sturm** or **durch den Sturm zerstört**. It gets tested directly in exams.

① **von** takes the Dativ and **durch** takes the Akkusativ — both are laid out on the [prepositions page](#).

03 02:30

Tenses: one table, six rows

The only thing that changes in the passive is the verb **werden**. The Partizip II **never moves** — it stays at the end, in the same form.

TENSE	PATTERN	EXAMPLE
Präsens	wird + P II	Das Auto wird repariert .
Präteritum	wurde + P II	Das Auto wurde repariert .
Perfekt	ist + P II + worden	Das Auto ist repariert worden .
Plusquamperfekt	war + P II + worden	Das Auto war repariert worden .
With a modal	muss + P II + werden	Das Auto muss repariert werden .
Futur I	wird + P II + werden	Das Auto wird repariert werden .

The three you will use most: **Präsens · Präteritum · with a modal**. In formal letters the pattern you will meet is almost always **muss ... werden** or **kann ... werden**.



TRAP 1

geworden or worden?

The single most important line on this page. The Partizip II of **werden** is normally **geworden** — but **in a passive sentence** it shrinks to **worden** and the **ge-** drops off.

✗ **Das Auto ist repariert geworden.**

In the passive, **ge-** drops off.

✓ **Das Auto ist repariert worden.**

The car has been repaired.

✓ **Er ist Arzt geworden.**

He became a doctor. — this is not a passive, so **geworden** is right.

How to tell them apart: if the sentence has **a second Partizip II** (**repariert**) → **worden**. If not, **werden** means “to become” → **geworden**.

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04 04:20

State passive: the difference between **wird** and **ist**

German separates two kinds of passive, and English blurs the difference (“the door is opened” can mean either) — so learners mix them up all the time.

TYPE	PATTERN	WHAT IT SAYS
Vorgangspassiv action passive	wird + P II	Die Tür wird geöffnet. — The door is <i>being opened</i> . Someone is opening it right now.
Zustandspassiv state passive	ist + P II	Die Tür ist geöffnet. — The door is <i>open</i> . The action is finished, the result remains.

A shortcut: **do you see movement or a state?** Movement → **wird**. State → **ist**. Think “is being opened” versus “is open”.

✓ **Das Geschäft **wird** um 8 Uhr geöffnet.**

The shop opens at 8. — the act of opening, at that moment.

- ✓ **Das Geschäft *ist* ab 8 Uhr geöffnet.**

The shop is open from 8. — a state.



TRAP 2

A Dativ object never becomes the subject

Only the **Akkusativ** object moves up in the passive. With Dativ verbs like **helfen** • **danken** • **gratulieren** the object **stays in the Dativ** and does not become the subject.

- ✗ **~~Ich~~ werde geholfen.**

helfen takes no Akkusativ — this cannot be built.

- ✓ **Mir wird geholfen.**

I'm being helped.

- ✓ **Dem Chef wurde gratuliert.**

The boss was congratulated.

- ① Which verbs take the Dativ is laid out in a table on the [Dativ verbs page](#). That list is the key to this trap.

05 05:50

What nobody tells you: escaping with man, and the subjectless passive

Textbooks teach the passive but do not tell you **what Germans use instead**. In everyday speech, **man** often takes its place — like English “you” or “they” (“they speak German here”) — and it is your **ready-made escape route** when you cannot build the sentence.

PASSIVE	WITH MAN	WHERE TO USE IT
Hier wird Deutsch gesprochen.	Hier spricht man Deutsch.	both are correct — the second is more chatty
Das darf nicht gemacht werden.	Das darf man nicht machen.	in speech, the second

It does not work the other way round: **man sounds weak in formal writing**. Applications, emails, exam texts → passive. Chatting → **man**.

The second thing nobody says: German can build a **passive with no subject at all**. English has no equivalent, and the first time you hear it the sentence sounds broken:

- ✓ **Es wird getanzt.**

There is dancing. — who is dancing is never said.

- ✓ **Heute wird gearbeitet.**

Work is going on today. — es dropped out because the first slot is already filled.

The **es** here is not a real subject, just **a filler that occupies the first slot**. It drops out as soon as something else moves to the front. You will see this structure constantly on signs and workplace notices.

06 06:35

What to do this week

This topic sticks by **converting sentences**. Five minutes a day:

- Write an active sentence: **Der Mechaniker repariert das Auto.**
- **Find the Akkusativ object** (das Auto) and move it to the front.
- Change the verb: **Das Auto wird repariert.**
- Build the same sentence in three tenses: **wurde repariert · ist repariert worden · muss repariert werden.**
- Then write it with **man** and compare the two — which one sounds more formal?

① Next up is Konjunktiv II: talking about things that are not real, and softening your voice when you ask for something.

07 BUILD

Build the sentence yourself

Tap the words and put them in order. This is the hardest part of German — and there are no options to pick from, **you** build it.

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TIPS

Know this before the test

The core of the topic in three lines, then the mistakes people make most often.

01

werden + Partizip II

The passive is built with **werden**, not **sein**. **werden** is the verb that gets

02

Tenses run through werden

Present is **wird**, past is **wurde**, and the Perfekt is **ist**

03

The object becomes the subject, the doer drops out

conjugated; the participle stays frozen at the end.

Das Auto wird repariert.

... **worden**. In the Perfekt you use **worden**, not **geworden**.

wird gebaut · wurde gebaut
· ist gebaut worden

The Akkusativ object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive. The doer does not have to be named; **man disappears completely** in the passive.

Man repariert das Auto. →
Das Auto wird repariert.

04

von for a person, durch for a cause

If you do name the doer: a person or institution takes **von** + Dativ, a cause or means takes **durch** + Akkusativ. With natural events **von** works too: vom Sturm zerstört.

vom Chef geschrieben
· durch das
Hochwasser zerstört

✗ ~~Das Haus ist letztes Jahr gebaut geworden.~~

✓ Das Haus ist letztes Jahr gebaut worden.

In the Perfekt passive, the participle of **werden** is **worden**. **geworden** belongs to the verb meaning “to become”.

✗ ~~Das Fenster wird seit gestern geöffnet.~~

✓ Das Fenster ist seit gestern geöffnet.

werden describes an **ongoing process**. When there is a **state** rather than a process, you use **sein**.

✗ ~~Das Auto wird von man repariert.~~

✓ Das Auto wird repariert.

✗ ~~Die Straße wurde von das Hochwasser zerstört.~~

man is not carried into the passive, it is dropped. There is no such thing as von man.

✓ Die Straße wurde vom Hochwasser zerstört.

von always takes the Dativ: von dem → vom.
With the Akkusativ das Hochwasser only durch works: durch das Hochwasser. With natural events both are correct.

07 07:00

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

Finish the topic: take the full test

13 questions · timed · exam style · 60% finishes the topic



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