

# Common Uses

## 8.2 Using the Passive

The passive voice is used more commonly in academic writing than in more informal writing. While sentences in active voice are often considered stronger and clearer, passive voice is commonly used:

<p><b>1.</b> to focus attention on new or important ideas or information by placing it at the beginning of the sentence</p> <p><b>a.</b> Moving the object to the subject position can provide cohesion between ideas or paragraphs</p> <p><b>b.</b> Use a <i>by</i>-phrase when it is important to know who the agent is</p>	<p>Barack Obama <b>was</b> first <b>elected</b> president in 2008.</p> <p>The art world has long admired <u>Banksy</u>, a mysterious street artist. In spite of great efforts, <u>Banksy's identity</u> <b>has not been confirmed</b>.</p> <p>The <i>Mona Lisa</i> <b>was painted</b> by <u>Leonardo da Vinci</u> in the early 16th century.</p>
<p><b>2.</b> to avoid repetitive or unnecessary information about the agent of the action</p>	<p>Students <b>were tested</b> at the beginning and end of the semester. (We assume teachers were the agents, or the ones who tested the students.)</p> <p>Male professors are much more likely <b>to be described</b> as "brilliant" in student evaluations. (We know students describe the professors because these are "student evaluations.")</p>
<p><b>3.</b> to express information in a more polite way or to avoid blaming someone; a <i>by</i> phrase is not used in this context</p>	<p>The candidate <b>was accused</b> of spreading false rumors about his competition.</p> <p>Students <b>are not</b> always <b>given</b> the option of retaking a test.</p> <p>He apologized for remarks that <b>were considered</b> offensive.</p>
<p><b>4.</b> to convey objectivity and an impersonal tone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is common in scientific papers, especially the methods and materials section of a scientific report.</li><li>• About 30 percent of clauses in scientific articles are passive.</li></ul>	<p>Participants <b>should be given</b> as much information as possible about the research ahead of time.</p> <p>Results <b>were analyzed</b> with a standard statistical method.</p>

### Notes

1. Passive voice is also a way to avoid using personal pronouns such as *I* and *we* as they are often discouraged in academic writing. Likewise, impersonal pronouns such as *someone* are vague and can weaken a sentence.
2. Adverbs can be used to modify a passive verb. In the simple present and past, they appear between *be* and the past participle. With perfect tenses or modals, they appear after the modal or form of *have* and before *be*.

Negative campaign ads **are often used** in presidential elections.

The ad **will not likely be aired** again as it was considered offensive and untrue.

## ACTIVITY 2

Read each set of sentences. Underline the correct form of the words in parentheses.

1. A link (*has found / has been found*) between activity in a particular structure of the brain and creative problem-solving. According to researchers at Stanford University, activity in the cerebellum (*involves / is involved*) in the creative process, whereas greater activity in the parts of the brain that help you plan and manage (*impairs / is impaired*) creativity.
2. Exports (*fell / were fallen*) dramatically in the last quarter. Some of the decline in exports (*could attribute / could be attributed*) to the holidays and bad weather, but not all. Analysts (*expected / were expected*) exports to increase and (*surprised / were surprised*) by the numbers.
3. After Austria-Hungary (*defeated / was defeated*) in World War I, a new country (*created / was created*) that (*included / was included*) Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Herzegovina. This new country of Yugoslavia (*dissolved / was dissolved*) during World War II and the rise of the Axis powers. The second Yugoslavia (*formed / was formed*) in 1946, and it (*covered / was covered*) the earlier territory as well as some land acquired from Italy. Economic problems (*led / were led*) to the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.
4. Over the last few years, food companies (*have mixed / have been mixed*) fruits and vegetables into other products. For example, spinach (*has added / has been added*) to pasta, and applesauce has been added to brownies. These tricks (*have tried / have been tried*) by desperate parents for a long time in their quest to get picky children to eat more healthy foods. However, some health experts (*bother / are bothered*) by this new trend. They (*fear / are feared*) that children (*will not learn / will not be learned*) healthy eating habits this way.

# Common Errors

## Common Error 8.1 Do you use the correct form of the verb?

Several languages are <sup>spoken</sup> ~~spoke~~ in Switzerland.

**REMEMBER:** Use the past participle after *be* in passive voice.

### ACTIVITY 3 Common Error 8.1

Fill in the blank with the correct form of the verb in parentheses.

1. The study was \_\_\_\_\_ (*conduct*) by researchers in several countries.
2. The results can be \_\_\_\_\_ (*see*) in table 3.2.
3. Crows are \_\_\_\_\_ (*know*) to be curious and intelligent.
4. Many sports figures have been \_\_\_\_\_ (*accuse*) of using drugs or other banned substances.
5. Even being \_\_\_\_\_ (*consider*) for the award is a great honor.
6. Matisse may have been \_\_\_\_\_ (*influence*) by an exhibit of African sculptures at Trocodero Museum before he decided to travel to North Africa in 1906.
7. More money was \_\_\_\_\_ (*spend*) to host the Sochi Winter Olympics in Russia than to host any other Olympic Games.
8. According to Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Blink*, judgments that are \_\_\_\_\_ (*make*) within just a few seconds are often remarkably accurate.

## Common Error 8.2 Do you include a form of *be* in the passive voice?

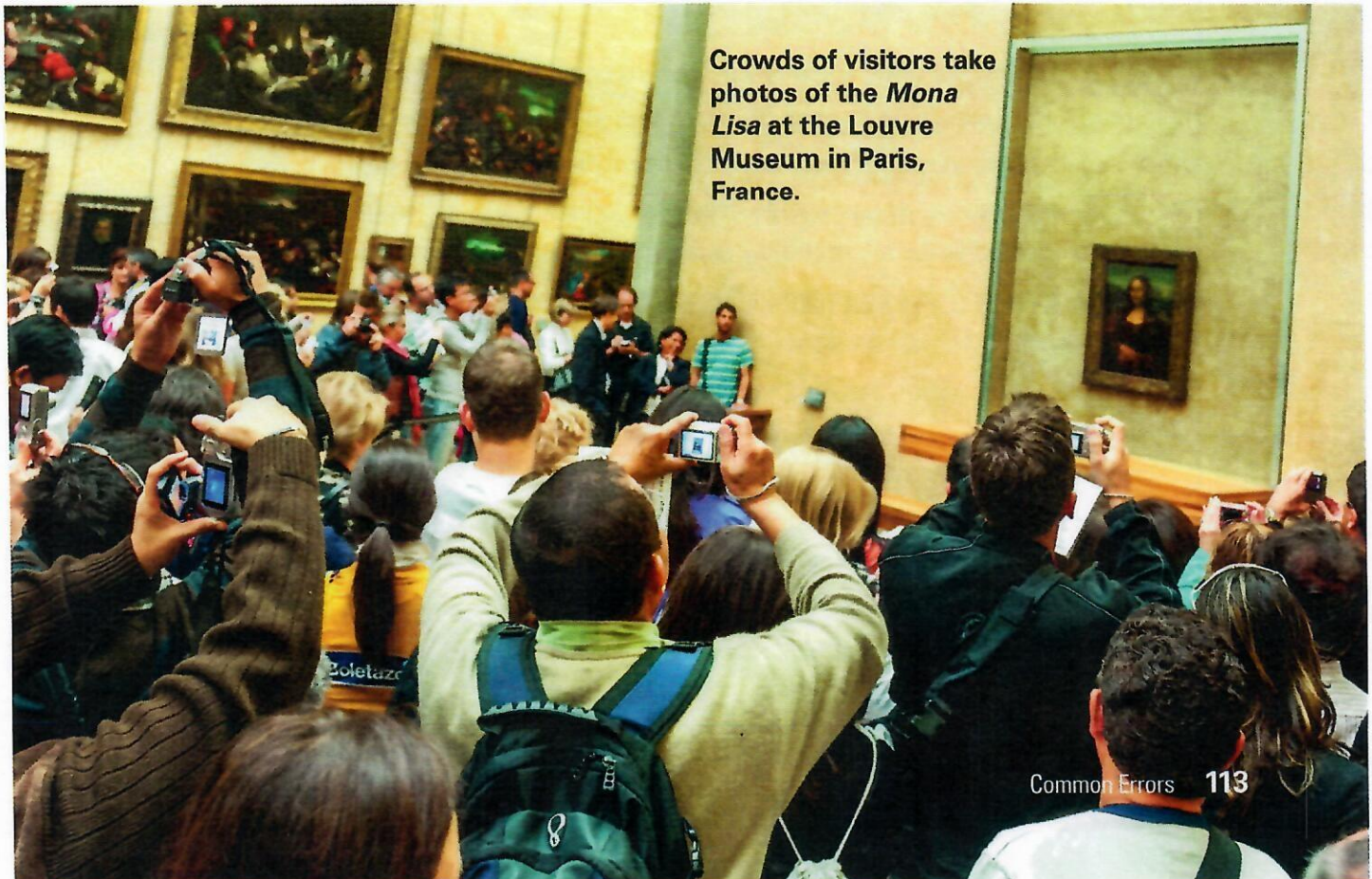
Mo Yan <sup>was</sup> interviewed after winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012.

**REMEMBER:** You must use a form of *be* with the past participle in passive voice.

#### ACTIVITY 4 Common Error 8.2

Read the sentences. Find where the *be* forms are missing. Write a correction above where the missing word(s) should be. Some sentences have more than one missing form of *be*.

1. Seed banks usually designed to protect biodiversity by storing seeds in climate-controlled vaults.
2. Because lying often accompanied by feelings of guilt, it creates stress which can be detected by lie detector machines.
3. Recently, certain disease-resistant crops have developed through genetic modification, but some consumers refuse to eat them.
4. Risk factors for heart disease that have identified include obesity, smoking, diabetes, and high cholesterol.
5. The Greek philosopher Aristotle known as the father of political science.
6. In the report released a few years ago, investigators determined that efforts made to cover up the disaster.
7. Bananas picked while they are still green and then shipped around the world.
8. Although it painted several hundred years ago, the *Mona Lisa* still considered a great work of art, though this may be due more to its fame than to its actual artistic qualities.



Crowds of visitors take photos of the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France.

### Common Error 8.3 Do you need passive or active voice?

Perhaps as many as 100 million people <sup>died</sup> ~~were died~~ as a result of the 1918 influenza pandemic.

**REMEMBER:** Use passive voice only with transitive verbs when the subject of the sentence receives the action.

#### ACTIVITY 5 Common Error 8.3

Underline the correct form of the verb in parentheses.

1. British researchers recently (*tested / were tested*) the effect that the time of a vaccination (*had / was had*) on effectiveness. They (*found / were found*) that people who (*give / are given*) a flu vaccine in the morning (*protect better / are better protected*) than those who (*vaccinate / are vaccinated*) in the afternoon.
2. Research (*has shown / has been shown*) that walking in parks and other green spaces (*reduces / is reduced*) stress. In a new study, researchers (*wanted / were wanted*) to find out if photos of green spaces (*could do / could be done*) the same thing. Sensors that monitor heart activity (*attached / were attached*) to participants. Then the participants (*gave / were given*) a stressful test. Afterward, they (*showed / were shown*) either photos of trees or of buildings. Those who (*saw / were seen*) trees (*had / were had*) lower heart rates.
3. Workers in their forties often (*experience / are experienced*) dissatisfaction with their jobs. This dissatisfaction (*often causes / is often caused*) by a feeling that earlier expectations (*have not met / have not been met*). For example, if you (*thought / were thought*) you would be head of a company and you are not, you might (*feel / be felt*) like a failure. Highly dissatisfied employees are more likely (*to report / to be reported*) stress and physical pain, and are more likely (*to diagnose / to be diagnosed*) with depression.