# UNIT 2 LESSON 4

## VOICE AND TENSE

## ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Look at the following sentences

1. **The operators conducted a test on the turbo generator**.
2. **A test was conducted on the turbo generator by the operators**.

You may observe in the first sentence the subject – (the operators) **perform the action** of the verb – (conducted). On the other hand, in the second sentence, the same subject **receives the action** of the verb. In other words, the former gives importance to the agent or the doer of the action. The verb "conducted" in the first sentence is a descriptive, action packed verb and is in active form. Hence this sentence is said to be in **Active Voice.** On the other hand, the verb "was conducted" containing an auxiliary verb "was" is.in**Passive Voice**

In grammar, the term **voice** is used to show the two different ways in which an action can be viewed – **1.** Someone or something performing an action and

**2**. the action is being performed on someone or something.

Whenever we talk about a verb denoting an action, we also need to talk about the time at/during which the action occurs. This sense of time is reflected through the tense, a concept very fundamental to the grammar of any language. You might have observed in the sample sentences that there is a strong link between the voice of the verb and the tense. The table below gives an idea on how the verb in one voice changes into the other according to the tense that it denotes.

| Tense/Verb form | Active Voice | Passive Voice |
|---|---|---|
| Simple present | Analyses | is analysed |
| Present continuous | is analyzing | is being analysed |
| Simple past | Analysed | was analysed |
| Past continuous | was analysing | was being analysed |
| Present Perfect | has analysed | has been analysed |
| Past perfect | had analysed | had been analysed |
| Future | will analyse | will be analysed |
| Conditional | would analyse | would be analysed |
| Perfect conditional | would have analysed | would have been analysed |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Present infinitive | to analyse | to be analysed |
| Perfect infinitive | to have analysed | to have been analysed |
| Present participle/gerund | analysing | being analysed |
| Perfect participle | having analysed | having analysed |

As already mentioned the focus (agent or action) is different in the two voices. But you must be able to use both effectively in your academic writing. Though many a time, the action gets more emphasis in scientific or technical writing, sometimes the doer gets importance as shown in the following examples.

The project was completed on time (focus is on the project)

Sohan's team completed the project on time (focus is on Sohan's team)

You may recall the innumerable grammar exercises you had worked on while at school on changing the sentences in active voice into passive voice and vice versa. Let us review the steps involved in this process.

**Changing Active Voice into Passive Voice**

- Identify the subject (agent or thing that is causing the action) – who performed.
- Identify the object (what action has been done – performed what)
- Note the tense of the verb.
- Begin the passive sentence with the action (object of the active sentence)
- Use the third form of the verb (past participle) preceded by the appropriate auxiliary verb and followed by the phrase "by the"
- Complete the changed sentence with the agent or thing (subject of the active sentence). Note that the agent in the Passive voice that comes at the end may be implicit as shown in brackets in the below give examples.

| Active Voice | Agent | Passive Voice |
|---|---|---|
| They will complete the project by Thursday. | They | The Project will be completed by them by Thursday. |
| I shall complete the project by noon. | I | The project shall be completed by me by noon. |
| This train would take you to Chennai. | This train | You would be taken to Chennai by this train. |
| Scientists have discovered traces of ice on the Mars. | Scientists (may or may not be included in the passive voice) | Traces of ice have been discovered on the surface of Mars. (by Scientists) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sometimes people do not appreciate our efforts. | People | Sometimes our efforts are not appreciated. (by the people) |
| Leela was driving the car. | Leela | The car was being driven by Leela. |
| I will complete my assignment tomorrow. | I | My assignment will be completed (by me) tomorrow. |
| You have completed your work. | You | Your work has been completed by you. |
| The Police held him for interrogation. | The Police | He was held by the Police for interrogation. |
| I had already undergone this procedure last year. | I | This procedure had already been undergone by me last year. |

**Changing Passive Voice into Active**

- Identify the doer/agent by noting carefully what follows the "by the.." phrase. If the agent is not specified, you may infer the agent from the action or context given in the following tables.
- Note down the action performed by the agent. (beginning of the passive sentence)
- Note the tense of the verb.
- Begin the active sentence with the agent.
- Choose the appropriate form of the verb according to the singular or plural form of the agent and the Simple Continuous, or perfect form of the tense of the verb.

| **Passive Voice** | **Agent** | **Active Voice** |
|---|---|---|
| Multifarious operations are performed by these computers. | These computers | These computers perform multifarious operations. |
| The equipment for the practical examinations was being arranged by the technician. | Technician | The technician was arranging the equipment for the practical examinations. |
| Results will be published in the next issue of the journal. | Agent is not specified. It may be 'researchers' or the 'association'. | The researchers will publish the results in the next issue of the journal. |
| The components were identified by Thomas and his associates. | Thomas and his associates. | Thomas and his associates identified the components. |

More examples for active and passive voice sentences in different Tenses are given below

**Simple Present Tense**

Active – We add water to mixture

Passive – Water is added to the mixture (by us)

**Simple Past Tense**

Active – The Civil Engineers tried out different layouts.

Passive – Different layouts were tried out by the Civil Engineers.

**Simple Future Tense**

Active – We will not carry out any research in this area.

Passive – No research will be carried out in this area.

**Present Perfect Tense**

Active – The Committee has approved the Plan.

Passive – The Plan has been approved by the Committee.

**Past Perfect Tense**

Active – The Engineers had completed the job in time.

Passive – The job had been completed in time by the Engineers.

**Present continuous and Past Continuous**

Active – They are repairing the road.

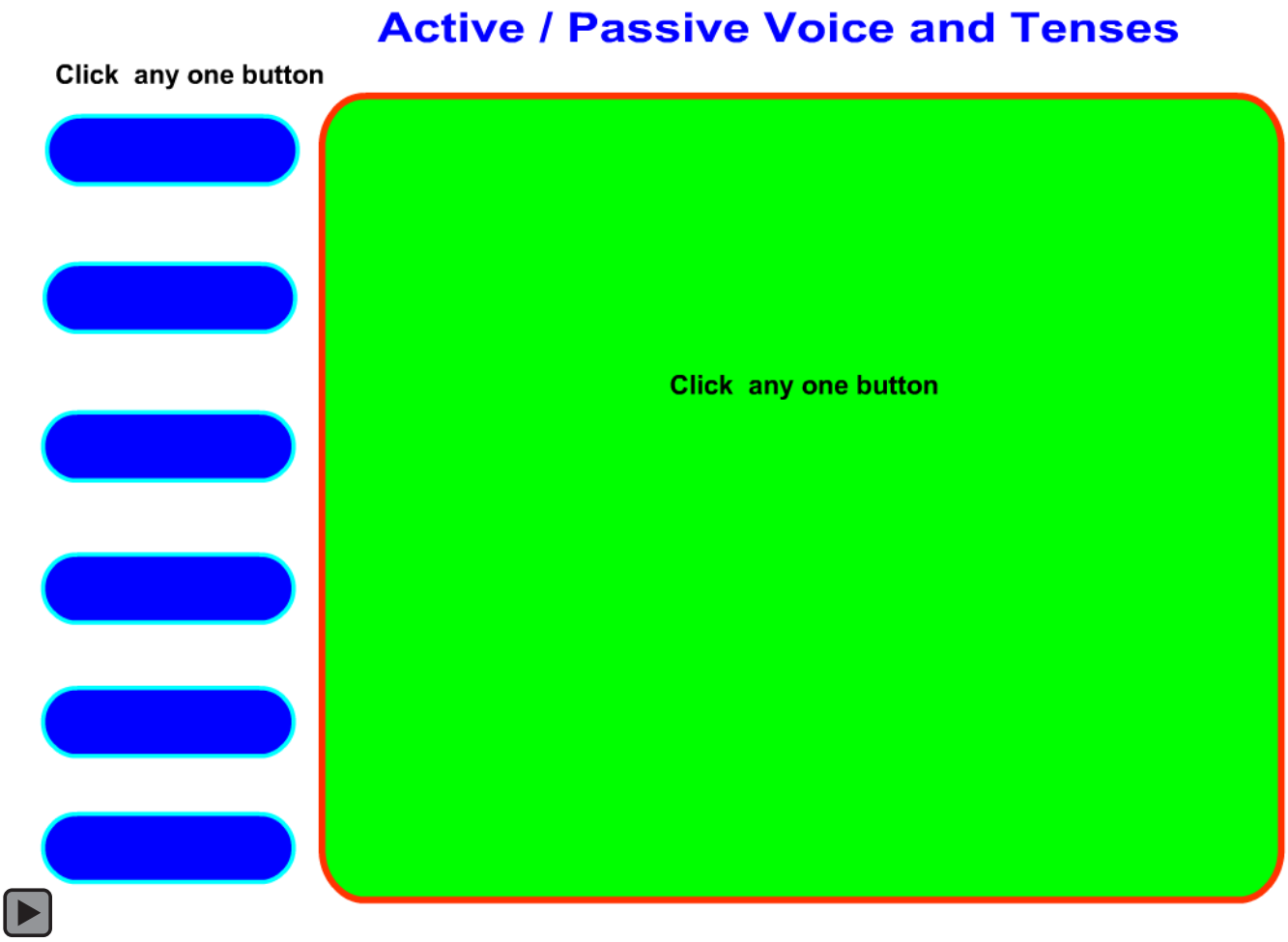
Passive – The road is being repaired.

**When to use Active Voice**:

While the doer is given importance in the active voice, the action gets prominence in the Passive Voice. Active Voice is used for clear, direct and strong writing and therefore requires active verbs.

**When to use Passive Voice**:

Passive Voice is used in most formal writings such as reports, proposals and complaints or rejection letters, because the action and not the doer (is important) needs to be given emphasis.

Remember all sentences cannot be transformed from active into passive voice. Only transitive verbs (which takes an object) can be transformed into passive voice.

To sum up the discussion on Voice and Tense, we can say that the tense of the verb undergoes a change when you transfer one voice into another. Passive construction is verbose while active is crisp, direct and unambiguous.