

# 23 The passive

The terms 'active voice' and 'passive voice' refer to the relationship between the verb and its subject. Whereas in the active voice the subject of the verb carries out the action, in the passive voice the subject of the verb is the receiver of the action.

active	passive
<b>Ich</b> verkaufe mein Auto. <i>I'm selling my car.</i>	<b>Mein Auto</b> wird verkauft. <i>My car is being sold.</i>

The passive is used less frequently in German than in English, but passive constructions do occur in speech and are often found in journalism and in commercial, official and legal documents.

## 23.1 Uses

The passive is used in order to emphasize the action itself rather than the person or thing (the 'agent') which causes it. Often the agent is not mentioned, or is unknown.

Das Büro wird morgen gestrichen.	<i>The office will be painted tomorrow.</i>
Ab 1. Januar werden die Preise erhöht.	<i>The prices will be increased as of 1st January.</i>

A characteristic and common use of the passive is in impersonal constructions; see 29.2.

## 23.2 Formation

■ **23.2.1** The present passive is formed from the present tense of **werden** and the past participle of the verb, which is placed at the end of a simple sentence or main clause.

Sing. 1. ich	<b>werde</b>	} gerufen	I am	} called
2. du	<b>wirst</b>		you are	
3. er/sie/es	<b>wird</b>		he/she/it is	

Pl. 1. wir	<b>werden</b>	} gerufen	we are	} called
2. ihr	<b>werdet</b>		you are	
3. sie/Sie	<b>werden</b>		they/you (formal) are	

■ **23.2.2** The future passive is formed from the future tense of **werden** and the past participle of the verb. The infinitive of **werden** is placed at the end of a simple sentence or main clause, following the past participle.

Ich **werde gerufen werden**. *I will be called.*

■ **23.2.3** The simple past passive is formed from the simple past tense of **werden** and the past participle of the verb, which is placed at the end of a simple sentence or main clause.

Sing. 1. ich	<b>wurde</b>	} gerufen	I was	} called
2. du	<b>wurdest</b>		you were	
3. er/sie/es	<b>wurde</b>		he/she/it was	
Pl. 1. wir	<b>wurden</b>	} gerufen	we were	} called
2. ihr	<b>wurdet</b>		you were	
3. sie/Sie	<b>wurden</b>		they/you (formal) were	

■ **23.2.4** The perfect and pluperfect passive are formed from the perfect/pluperfect of **werden** (25.1.2) and the past participle of the verb. **Worden** is placed at the end of a simple sentence or main clause, following the past participle.

- perfect passive  
Ich **bin gerufen worden**. *I have been called.*
- pluperfect passive  
Ich **war gerufen worden**. *I had been called.*