

Chapter 13 More on Verbs: Mood & Voice

Additional information and practice

A bit more about mood

Indicative mood includes declaratives, interrogatives, and exclamatives. English, unlike other languages, does not rely on features such as morphology or word order changes to express exclamatory formats. Modern Chinese, for instance, uses alterations in the word order, morphological markers (i.e., particles) along with the exclamation point to mark that a sentence is in the exclamatory format.¹

Interrogatives include yes/no-questions and *wh*-questions. *Wh*-word questions can target a variety of constituents! We've paired the *wh*-word questions with their corresponding declaratives to allow for a more comprehensive overview. This is an opportunity to flex your sentence-pattern knowledge as well!

who

- (1) *Who* is coming to dinner? (sE)
- (2) [*Pat*] [is coming] [to dinner].
- S V A

¹ Dinar, T., and B. Zhylkybekuly, (2024), *Exclamatory Sentences in Modern Chinese and how They Differ From other Types of Sentences: Theoretical and Practical Aspects of the Development of Science and Education*. International Science Group, p. 198.

- *who* targets the subject of the underlying declarative sentence. This makes sense, since *who*, as a pronoun, is in subject case and functions as the subject.

whom

(3) *Whom* are you taking to the movies? (sE)

(4) [I] [am taking] [*Latoya*] [to the movies].

S V DO A

- *whom* targets the direct object and so the interrogatory pronoun functions as the direct object in the question and, according to sE rules, must be in object form: *whom* not *who* (but many speakers prefer *who* over *whom*,² because *whom* feels stuffy!)

what

(5) *What* could you get?

(6) [You] [could get] [*those big fat juicy fresh donuts*].³ (AAE)

S V DO

(7) *What* is so expensive anymore?

(8) [*Pantyhose*] [are] [so expensive] [anymore].⁴ (ME)

² Reaser, J., C. T. Adger, W. Wolfram, and D. Christian (2017), *Dialects at School: Education Linguistically Diverse Students*. New York: Routledge, p. 17.

³ Kendall, T., M. Quartey, C. Farrington, J. McLarty, S. Arnson, and B. Josler, B. (2018). *The Corpus of Regional African American Language: DCB (Washington DC 2016)*. Version 2018.10.06. Eugene, OR: The Online Resources for African American Language Project. <http://oraal.uoregon.edu/coraal>. Transcript ID DCB_se2_ag4_f_03_2.

⁴ Murray, 1993; cited in Maher, Z., and T. McCoy (2011), 'Positive anymore', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/positive-anymore>. Accessed on 2024-02-23). Updated by Katie Martin (2018).

S V SC A

- *what* can target various constituents. In (5), *what* targets the direct object; in (7), the subject.

which

- (9) *Which* cat is going to the vet? (sE)
- (10) [The *tiny/mean* cat] [is going] [to the vet].
- (11) [The cat *that has the hurt leg*] [is going] [to the vet].

S V A

- *which* can target any number of grammatical structures within a sentence-level constituent: a pre-modifying adjective (*tiny/mean*) in (10); a postmodifier (*that has the hurt leg*) in (11). As you saw earlier, *which* can also target components inside non-subject constituents; as such, *which* is quite versatile.
- Notice that in the question format, the single count noun *cat* no longer needs a determiner *the*. This shows us that the question word *which* functions as the determiner here.

where

- (12) *Where* did I put that wicked good recipe?⁵ (NEE)
- (13) [I] [put] [this wicked good recipe] [*on top of the recipe book*].

S V DO A

⁵ W. Beaugard, personal communication, August 31, 2024.

(14) *Where* are you going? (sE)

(15) [I] [am going] [*home*].

S V A

- *where* targets adverbials in a sentence that reveal information related to location. The adverbials can come in different shapes; here, we have a {PP} and {AdvP}, for example.

when

(16) *When* are you leaving for vacation? (sE)

(17) [*Tomorrow*], [Jean] [is leaving] [for vacation].

A S V A

(18) [Jean] [is leaving] [for vacation] [*in the morning*].

S V A A

(19) [*After we celebrate her promotion*], [Jean] [is leaving] [for vacation].

A S V A

- *when* targets adverbials, which may come in different forms ({AdvP}, {PP}, and even entire clauses (as in (19))). Since these structures are syntactically flexible—occurring in many forms and in many places in the sentence—the exact location is not as relevant as the type of structure in question.

why

(20) *Why* did the cat chase the dog? (sE)

(21) [The cat] [chased] [the dog] [*to get revenge*].

S V DO A

(22) [The cat] [chased] [the dog] [*because she is fierce*].

S V DO A

- *why* targets adverbials just like *where* and *when*, and these adverbials again can come in different forms, including *to-clauses* (21) and subordinate clauses (22).

how

(23) *How* did the cake turn out? (sE)

(24) [The cake] [turned out] [*fine*].

S V A

(25) [The cake] [turned out] [*a little dry*].

S V A

- *how*—similar to *where*, *when*, and *why*—targets adverbials. These adverbials also come in many different forms.

A bit more about Voice: Arguments Against Using Passive Voice

Many guidebooks argue against using the passive. This bias toward the active often attempts to scare the writer away from the passive by saying such things as

- “If energy has occurred in the work, unnatural passive voice saps the energy and leaves dead words on the pages” (Alley, 1996, p. 106).
- “Needlessly passive verbs slow your writing” (Alley, 1996, p. 106)
- Passive voice is “less bold, and less concise” (Strunk & White, 2000, p. 18).
- “Never use the passive when you can use the active” (Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, 1946, p. 20).
- Active voice is more “vigorous” and “straightforward” (Iida, 2020)

This advice has been taken to heart by so many teachers, writers, and editors that crazy situations result.

- Dr. Alan Rubin, author of *Diabetes for Dummies* (1999) said,
“Sometimes I’ll write something like ‘the patient was comatose and was given thyroid hormone,’ and they’ll [editors] change that to ‘the patient was comatose and took thyroid hormone . . . I have to tell them these are extremely sick patients, [sic] they can’t take care of themselves.’”

Since the passive exists, how is it useful?

A bit more about Semantic and Social Choices of Voice

Let's look at some additional examples of passive voice and explore what it does for us as speakers and writers. In Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band's song *Born in the USA* (1984) captures one of the most common usages of the passive. English speakers and writers often make statement of where they are from, such as these:

(26) She was born in Houston, Texas.

(27) He was born in Midland, Michigan.

(28) They were born in Nashville, Tennessee.

Can you explain why these sentences are passive constructions?

What would be the active form of this next sentence?

(29) My mother bore me in Houston, Texas.

Here's the step-by-step procedure to turn (29) into passive voice:

1. "Mother" is the agent/'doer' and "me" is the object—the thing she bore. The object ("me") is moved to the subject position, which is why we'd get the subject form "I".
2. The subject "My mother" moves into the optional *by*-phrase.

3. The VP then needs to have a form of *be* plus the past participle of the main verb, “born”. This results in the following sentence:

(30) I was born in Houston, Texas, (by my mother).

This is a pretty handy use of the passive particularly since the speaker/writer desires to place the emphasis on self, not the fact a mother went through the birthing process. This makes (30) a better option than its active-voice equivalent in (29).

Let’s look at some additional sentences that bear out the function of passive voice.

(31) **Billy** broke **the window** with a baseball. (active)

(32) **The window** was broken with a baseball. (passive)

Why might Billy choose the second version when telling his parents of this event? What if you came home from work or school to find a broken window and a baseball inside your house? Why must you use the passive voice?

Now, what about this pair? What makes passive the more useful of the two?

(33) **I** mix two parts hydrogen with one part oxygen to create water. (active)

(34) **Water** is created by mixing two parts hydrogen with one part oxygen. (passive)

Why would the passive be preferred in science writing? Is the agent/‘doer’ important? Does it matter who does the mixing? In other words, are the results more important than the one who does the mixing?

What could be some social implications of the passive?

(35) **We** won’t invite the Millers. (active)

(36) **The Millers** won’t be invited (by us). (passive)

Why might someone characterize the lack of invitation to the Millers using the passive? How does it soften the action? What effect might choosing the active voice cause hearers or readers to think? Practice creating the active and passive forms and justifying why you would use that voice. Here are some scenarios that might inspire you:

- Writing up a lab report for your geology, biology, chemistry class;
- Testifying in court;
- Explaining an ancient philosophy to your peers;
- Giving an account of your favorite birthday;
- Giving an account of a sad event that happened to you;
- Writing a synthesis of research articles for a paper;

Or

- Writing a creative piece about a favorite pet.
- These are just some examples. You can certainly come up with ideas of your own!

A bit more about Voice Variation

Naturally, there is some variation when it comes to passive voice among all the American English dialects! Let's look at some specific features of possible constructions in passive voice for Pittsburghese first. In addition to Pittsburgh, this feature is also common in Western Pennsylvania, Eastern Ohio, Northern West Virginia, and Central Indiana (Maher & Wood, 2011). Murray and Simon (2002) suggest that this feature is primarily associated with white speakers, even in regional areas where this feature does occur. The examples below are all from Tenny (1998, p. 592).

- (37) The car **needs washed** very carefully.
- (38) The car **needs washed** in a hurry.
- (39) The dog **needs scratched** hard.
- (40) The dog **needs scratched** for an hour.
- (41) The house **needs painted** by the owner.

As we can see from these examples, in Pittsburghese, speakers can replace the 'be' verb with the verb "need." You can add the by-phrase to highlight the agent (as you can see in the last example). Here are a few more examples using the present participle form (the -ing form, remember?) (Tenny, 1998, p. 592):

- (42) The car **has been needing washed** for a long time now.
- (43) The car **might have been needing washed** since last year; I'm not sure.

Additionally, the verb “need” can be replaced with “like” and “want” as shown below (Murray & Simon (2002) as cited in Maher & Wood (2011)):

(44) Cindy, this one [baby] just woke up and probably **wants fed**.

(45) [The dog] sure does **like petted**.

Because *need* is the most common verb that occurs in this feature, it is called the *need* + *V-en* construction. The “V-en” indicates that the verb will have a passive participle ending (Maher & Wood, 2011).

Another variation that has to do with passive voice occurs in Philadelphia and parts of Vermont (as well as in Canadian English (Fruehwald & Myler, 2015). Here are two examples:

(46) I’m done my homework.

(47) I’m started the project.

(48) I’m finished my fries.

In each case, the passive auxiliary of *be* is needed, the participle of “finish” or “do” and a NP (like “my homework” above). This construction is called an adjectival passive (Fruehwald & Myler, 2015) and is different from the other passives we have discussed. While it may sound odd to anyone not from the dialect areas in which this is a feature, this construction is “fully productive” (Fruehwald & Myler, 2015, p. 142) and not just part of certain idioms or set phrases. Can you create your own two example sentences based on the description above?

The last variation of passive voice that we will discuss is generally called the *get* passive, because it uses, surprise!, the word *get* rather than the word *be*. This feature is common among all English dialects and is generally associated with spoken language as such (Cambridge University Press, 2021). Here are some examples:

- (49) The cat **got jabbed** by the vet.
- (50) The vet **got promoted** by their boss.
- (51) The flowers **got smashed** by the storm.
- (52) Jean **has gotten** fired the other day.

More practice from Exercise 1

Indicative mood. Practice turning declaratives into interrogatives and vice versa. If a declarative is provided, turn it into an interrogative that targets the italicized portion of the declarative. If an interrogative is provided, turn it into a declarative.

- a) Now I'm wicked tired and I am going to go *to bed*.⁶ (NEE)
- b) These were exceptionally expensive *when they barely came out*.⁷ (ChE)
- c) The dogs barked furiously at the neighbor. (sE)
- d) Did Johnny run down the hill *a-aiming to go to his uncle's*?⁸ (SAE)
- e) Was I reading something just now? (sE)
- f) When did they brush the cats to keep their coats healthy? (sE)

More practice from Exercise 3

Label each sentence (all sE) as indicative mood (Ind.M), imperative mood (Imp.M), or subjunctive mood (SM). For indicative mood, also specify if the sentence is a declarative (D), yes/no-question (y/n), wh-word question (wh), or exclamation (E).

- a) Sam and Hunter stepped outside, breathing in the crisp air. (sE)

⁶ W. Beaugregard, personal communication, August 29, 2024.

⁷ Fought, C. (2003), *Chicano English in Context*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 106.

⁸ slightly modified from Montgomery, 2009; cited in Matyiku, S. (2011a), 'A-prefixing', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://vgdp.yale.edu/phenomena/a-prefixing>. Accessed on 2024 -02-24). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

- b) They hadn't seen him since last night. (sE)
- c) The barn door creaked open as Sam pushed it gently. (sE)
- d) Hunter's heart began to race. (sE)
- e) Who would be lurking in here at this hour? (sE)
- f) If someone were hiding, they'd have made a noise by now. (sE)
- g) Suddenly, a soft meow echoed through the barn. (sE)
- h) There was their small kitten, staring up at them with wide eyes. (sE)
- i) Sam scooped up the kitten and everything felt a little brighter. (sE)
- j) Sam and Hunter returned to the house. (sE)
- k) They finally found the kitten! (sE)

More practice from Exercise 4

Label the italicized {VPs} as either active (A) or passive (P) voice.

- a) That show *was wicked* awesome.⁹ (NEE)
- b) The blue car *was crashed into* by Maria. (sE)
- c) Hundreds of never-published fairytales *have been discovered* in northern Bavaria. (sE)
- d) A collection of these tales *has been published* in German. (sE)
- e) We *was taught* that there is no such thing.¹⁰ (AAE)
- f) The cats *need* a bath right now. (sE)
- g) The cats *are bathed* once a month. (sE)
- h) Pies *can be eaten*. (sE)

Supplemental Practice 1

Picture task: Please use the below image to construct three sentences following the guidance provided for each.

⁹ Ravindranath, 2011; cited in Wood, J. (2024), 'Wicked', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdv.yale.edu/phenomena/wicked>. Accessed on 2024-08-29).

¹⁰ Kendall, T., M. Quartey, C. Farrington, J. McLarty, S. Arnson, and B. Josler, B. (2018). *The Corpus of Regional African American Language: DCB* (Washington DC 2016). Version 2018.10.06. Eugene, OR: The Online Resources for African American Language Project. <http://oraal.uoregon.edu/coraal>. Transcript ID DCB_se1_ag3_m_02_1.



Figure: Family talking over a traditional meal (gettyimages)

- Write a sentence from the perspective of the little girl. Give the little girl a name and use a form of the verb *eat*.
- Write a sentence focusing on the chef using a form of the verb *prepare*.
- Write a sentence focalizing the food as the subject and a form of the verb *enjoy*.

Now, analyze each sentence by determining the following:

Is the subject of the sentence the agent, that is the doer, of the action?

Describe the components of the {VP}: is it a single main verb? Is it a {VP} with auxiliary verbs plus main verb; and if the sentence does have more than one verb in the {VP}, what kind of auxiliary verb or verbs are present (a form of *be* or *have*? a modal verb)?

Did you or could you add a *by*-phrase that identifies the agent or doer of the action, for example, *The cat was chased by the dog*?

Now, based on your answers, is the sentence in active or passive voice?

Your sentence #1:

Commented [VD1]: DETAILS

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Your sentence #2:

Your sentence #3:

Supplemental Practice 2

Moodiness Review

Let's now combine all that we have seen regarding English moods and practice (see chart below).

Mood	Example sentence	A resource or context that employs this mood effectively (e.g., a story, an interview, a type of document)
Ex.: Interrogative	Where were you last night at 7 o'clock when the crime was committed?	Police interrogation
Indicative		
Imperative		
Interrogative		
Conditional		
Regular Subjunctive		
Mandative Subjunctive		

Supplemental Practice 3

Practicing Voice Selection. Create sentences using the components provided and use active or passive voice. Explain your choice of voice.

Sentence components	Sentence	Voice	Reasoning
the child, broke, vase			
the thief, stole, jewels,			
virus, people, infected			
the dog, the cat, the fish, ate			
Bob, fired, the company			
Your choice			

Supplemental Practice 4

To practice your understanding of passive and active voice, complete the following chart. Label each sentence as passive or active and provide an explanation for how you know.

Active or passive?

Sentence	Active or passive and why
1. Three cats were rescued the other day.	
2. The reports were handed in by the students.	
3. Germans play soccer a lot.	
4. The blue car was crashed into by Maria.	
5. The DVD recorder was being repaired when I walked into the store.	
6. The cats are hungry all the time.	
7. The cats need bathed immediately!	
8. Hundreds of never-published fairy- and folktales have been discovered in northern Bavaria.	
9. A collection of these tales has been published in German.	
10. The cats need a bath right now.	
11. The cats are bathed once a month.	
12. The glass got shattered by me.	
13. Pies can be eaten.	
14. Pies can be yummy.	

Supplemental Practice 5

Practicing voice

Using the sentence parts provided in the first five examples, create a construction as directed in the Voice column (e.g., active, truncated passive, full passive). For the next three, define the sentence parts (subject, verb, direct object), and then create a sentence for each from those parts that illustrates the requested voice.

Voice	Sentence parts	Your construction
Ex. Active	Ted (S), build (V), homes (DO)	Ted builds homes. Ted is building homes. Ted built homes.
Truncated Passive	Ted (S), build (V), homes (DO)	
Full Passive	Ted (S), build (V), homes (DO), people (IO)	
Active	Mary (S), save (V), lives (DO)	
Truncated passive	Mary (S), save (V), lives (DO)	
Full passive	Mary (S), save (V), lives (DO)	
Active	Your choice	

Truncated passive	Your choice.	
Full passive	Your choice.	
For fun: Middle	Your choice.	

Supplemental Practice 6

Advanced passive exercises. Since you know a lot about verbs by now, you can tackle the following exercises with ease! Or at least after some contemplation. Recall all the information about verbs you learned in the chapter on verbs:

- Verb tense (past and present)
- Verb aspect (simple, progressive, perfect)

Identify tense and aspect below. We've done the first two as examples.

1. I **am visiting** my friends.
 - Tense: present
 - Aspect: progressive
2. We **walk** the dogs on the beach a lot.
 - Tense: present
 - Aspect: simple
3. I **was visiting** my friends.
4. We **walked** the dogs on the beach a lot.
5. We **have examined** the data closely.
6. We **had assigned** the survey before we discussed it in class.
7. I **have been reading** this author for years.
8. They **had been reading** the same author before they discovered another great one.

Supplemental Practice 7

All these sentences in supplemental practice 6 are in *active voice*. Can you turn some (or all) of them into passive voice sentences?

1. I **am visiting** my friends.
2. We **walk** the dogs on the beach a lot.
3. I **was visiting** my friends.
4. We **walked** the dogs on the beach a lot.
5. We **have examined** the data closely.
6. We **had assigned** the survey before we discussed it in class.
7. I **have been reading** this author for years.
8. They **had been reading** the same author before they discovered another great one.