

Passive Voice - Subjectless Passive

• Definition of Passive Voice

The minimum requirements for a passive construction in German are:

- 1) The verb cluster in the sentence must take a form of the passive auxiliary *werden* along with *Partizip II* of the lexical verb.
(*The lexical verb is that verb in the sentences which indicates the true action. The lexical verb give us the meaning.*)
- 2) The subject must be something other than the agent.

• Passive Voice with Dummy Subject “es”

Sometimes, there is no available subject for passive-voice sentences. In cases where no subject exists, the dummy-subject *es* serves as the element to which the verb agrees. This means that the verb conjugates to third person singular. In all instances where there is no true subject, the verb must conjugate to third person singular. *Es* can only occupy the fore-field. If *es* is not in the fore-field, it is left completely out of the sentence. The verb still conjugates to 3sg.

English has no equivalent example, so no direct translation of the subjectless passive construction is possible. In rendering these sentences into English, the translator must devise an appropriate English paraphrase.

Example sentences:

1. *Es wurde getanzt.* (*es* = dummy subject + *wurde* = passive auxiliary + *getanzt* = lexical verb, Partizip II)
(“It was danced”.) → Dancing was going on; There was dancing; People were dancing. etc.
2. *Es wird am Wochenende gefeiert.* (*es* = dummy subject + *wird* = passive auxiliary + *gefeiert* = Lexical Verb, Partizip II)
(“It will be celebrated on the weekend”.) → Partying will be going on during the weekend; We’ll be partying ... etc.

Analyze the following sentences by finding the above mentioned components.
Render each German sentence into a reasonable form of idiomatic and intelligible English.

3. *Es wird in diesem Gebäude nicht geraucht.* Literally: “It is not smoked in this building.”
4. *Es wird oft im Kino gegessen.* Lit.: “It is often eaten in the movie theater.”

• Passive Voice with no Subject

When the dummy-subject *es* is used, *es* must occupy the very first position of the sentence. The dummy subject *es* is not allowed to occupy any field in the sentence other than the fore-field. If *es* does not occupy the fore-field, then it must be omitted from the sentence altogether. Most any other element can appear in the fore-field (including Partizip II).

Example:

5. *Auf der Fete wurde getanzt.* (There is no *es* in the fore-field / *wurde* = pass aux / *getanzt* = Lexical Verb, Partizip II)
(Literally: “At the party was danced”.) → At the party, people were dancing; There was dancing going on at the party. etc.

Analyze each of the following sentences by finding the components of the passive verb.
The approximate English meaning is given with each.

6. *In diesem Gebäude wird nicht geraucht.* In this building there is no smoking.
7. *Geraucht wird in diesem Gebäude nie.* There’s never any smoking in this building.
8. *Im Kino wird oft gegessen.* People often eat in the movie theater.
9. *Hier wird gearbeitet.* Working is going on here.
10. *Auf der Straße wurde geschrien.* Yelling was going on in the street.
11. *Bei der komischen Stimmung wurde nur geschwiegen.* In the strange atmosphere people didn’t speak.
(*schweigen* = to be silent)