

The Passive: Objects & Common OET Ergative Exceptions

The verb is essential - understand what it means and how it works with objects

There are two different types of objects:

- **direct object** - the noun which receives the action
- **indirect object** - the noun which benefits from the action

Here is an example:

Paul **gave** a sandwich to Alain.

Paul **gave** Alain a sandwich.

A sandwich **was given** to Alain by Paul.

Alain **was given** a sandwich by Paul.

Sometimes it isn't possible to include an indirect object and unfortunately, this grammar changes for different verbs. Let's have a look at some examples:

Verb	Object	Active	Passive
give	direct object	Paul gave the instructions to Alain.	The instructions were given to Alain.
	indirect object	Paul gave Alain the instructions.	Alain was given the instructions.
explain	direct object	The nurse explained the instructions to Alain.	The instructions were explained to Alain.
	indirect object	The nurse explained Alain the instructions	Alain was explained the instructions
prescribe	direct object	The doctor prescribed paracetamol for Mr Smith.	Paracetamol was prescribed for Mr Smith
	indirect object	The doctor prescribed Mr Smith with paracetamol.	Mr Smith was prescribed with paracetamol.
discuss	direct object	Rubina discussed the passive gerund with her teacher.	The passive gerund was discussed with Rubina's teacher.
	indirect object	Rubina discussed her teacher	Rubina's teacher was discussed with the passive gerund
insert	direct object	The nurse inserted the endoscope into Mrs Smith's stomach.	The endoscope was inserted into Mrs Smith's stomach.
	indirect object	The nurse inserted Mrs Smith's stomach....	Mrs Smith's stomach was inserted...

inject	direct object	The nurse injected vitamin B into the muscle .	Vitamin B was injected the muscle .
	indirect object	The nurse injected the muscle with vitamin B .	The muscle was injected with vitamin B .
diagnose	direct object	The doctor diagnosed asthma .	Asthma was diagnosed.
	indirect object	The doctor diagnosed John with asthma .	John was diagnosed with asthma .
provide	direct object	The nurse provided oxygen to/for Mr Smith .	Oxygen was provided to/for Mr Smith .
	indirect object - preferable in terms of style	The nurse provided Mr Smith with oxygen .	Mr Smith was provided with oxygen .
prepare	direct object	The nurse prepared the vaccine for Mr Smith . The nurse prepared Mr Smith for the vaccine.	The vaccine was prepared for Mr Smith . Mr Smith was prepared for the vaccine.
	indirect object	-----	-----
advise	direct object	The nurse advised Mr Smith about the operation.	Mr Smith was advised about the operation.
	advise + object + infinitive	The nurse advised Mr Smith to drink more water.	Mr Smith was advised to drink more water.
	advise + gerund	The nurse advised drinking more fluids for/to Mr Smith .	Drinking more fluids was advised for/to Mr Smith .
	indirect object	The nurse advised Mr Smith drinking	Mr Smith was advised drinking more fluids
notify	direct object	The nurse notified the patient about the operation. The nurse notified the operation to the patient.	The patient was notified by the nurse about the operation. The operation was notified to the patient.
	indirect object		

Ergative Passive - Common OET Exceptions

What is the ergative passive?

Some transitive verbs can be used to show passive or active, in strange ways.

Sometimes a noun which is often thought of as passive/object is used as a subject in a sentence :

Blood Pressure: 120/80 - 175/95

It's common to think of blood pressure this way:

Paul's blood pressure *was affected* by his recent illness.

Paul's recent illness *affected* his blood pressure.

And there is nothing wrong with it!

However, the most common way we use blood pressure is to say that it is a subject (does something), instead of an object:

Paul's blood pressure *was increased* overnight.

And we do this with lots of other nouns too!

Exercise

Write a sentence for each of the nouns below:

- temperature (drop)
- class (start)
- ice (crack)
- building (shake)
- infection (worse)
- fever (break)
- cholesterol (decrease)

Answers

- temperature (drop)

Feel Mr Johnson's forehead. I think **his temperature** has dropped.

- class (start)

time? What time did the class start?

The class started at 09:00.

- ice (crack)

I stepped onto the ice and **it** cracked.

- building (shake)

There was an earthquake and the **buildings** were shaking / shook.

- infection (worse)
 - His chest infection has worsened.
 - His infection has worsened.
 - His infection is getting worse.
 - His infection was worsening during last night
 - The infection has worsened, resulting in him having a high temperature
- fever (break)

collocation - two words typically go together

- His fever broke at 12h.
- His fever has broken.
- Having used antibiotics for 3 days, we managed to reduce her temperature.
- At 12 am his fever broke.
- During his 12.00 check-up review his fever broke.
- His fever broke before midnight.
- cholesterol (decrease)
 - Despite his current medication, his level of cholesterol **has not decreased**.
 - His cholesterol has been decreasing over the last 2 months.
 - Mr Smith was commenced on regular medication, and as a result his cholesterol decreased.
 - His cholesterol increased after being non-compliant with his medication
 - Her cholesterol decreased from 350 to 320 after she had started medication.