

DUTCH PASSIVE VOICE

A one-page guide to worden, zijn, er and passive word order

The passive shifts the focus from **who does something** to **what happens** or **what is affected**. Dutch mainly uses **worden + participle** in non-perfect passives and **zijn + participle** in perfect passives.

1. ACTIVE TO PASSIVE

Active object → passive subject.

ACTIVE

De monteur repareert de fiets.

The mechanic repairs the bicycle.

PASSIVE

De fiets wordt gerepareerd.

The bicycle is being repaired.

OPTIONAL AGENT WITH DOOR

De fiets wordt door de monteur gerepareerd.

The bicycle is being repaired by the mechanic.

2. WORDEN OR ZIJN?

NON-PERFECT PASSIVE: WORDEN

De brief wordt verstuurd.

The letter is being sent / is sent.

De brief werd verstuurd.

The letter was sent.

PERFECT PASSIVE: ZIJN

De brief is verstuurd.

The letter has been sent / was sent.

De brief was verstuurd.

The letter had been sent.

3. COMMON PASSIVE PATTERNS

PRESENT / HABIT / SCHEDULE

De post wordt elke ochtend bezorgd.

The mail is delivered every morning.

De uitslag wordt morgen bekendgemaakt.

The result will be announced tomorrow.

WITH A MODAL

Het formulier moet worden ingevuld.

The form must be completed.

Also: **moet ingevuld worden.**

FUTURE WITH ZULLEN

De resultaten zullen worden gepubliceerd.

The results will be published.

4. ER + PASSIVE

IMPERSONAL: NO GRAMMATICAL SUBJECT

Er wordt hier veel gelachen.

People laugh a lot here.

Er werd hard gewerkt.

People worked hard.

No subject = singular **wordt / werd**.

ER + A REAL SUBJECT

Er wordt een huis gebouwd.

A house is being built.

Er worden tien huizen gebouwd.

Ten houses are being built.

Here **een huis / tien huizen** is the subject, so the verb agrees with it.

5. WORD ORDER

MAIN CLAUSE

De brief wordt morgen verstuurd.

The letter will be sent tomorrow.

SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

... dat de brief morgen wordt verstuurd.

... dat de brief morgen verstuurd wordt.

... that the letter will be sent tomorrow.

Both orders are Standard Dutch.

SEPARABLE VERBS

invullen → ingevuld

uitleggen → uitgelegd

uitnodigen → uitgenodigd

6. USE IT WELL

WHY USE THE PASSIVE?

Use it when the action or affected object matters more than the performer, or when the performer is unknown, obvious or irrelevant.

Mijn fiets is gestolen.

My bicycle has been stolen.

NOT EVERY VERB PASSIVIZES

Many transitive action verbs do, but verbs such as **hebben**, **bezitten**, **kennen** and reflexive verbs normally do not.

ADVANCED: KRIJGEN-PASSIVE

Ik krijg de documenten toegestuurd.

I am sent the documents.

THE QUICK TEST

1. Focus on the affected thing? Passive may fit.
2. Non-perfect passive? Use **worden**.
3. Completed/perfect passive? Use **zijn**.
4. No subject? Check for an impersonal **er wordt**.

USEFUL PATTERNS

wordt + participle - present passive
werd + participle - past passive
is + participle - perfect passive
moet worden + participle - modal passive
wordt door ... + participle - agent expressed

REMEMBER

Dutch **is gebouwd** may translate as *has been built* or simply *was built*.
Do not add **geworden** in the ordinary perfect passive.

Active is often clearer when the performer is important.