22

Advanced Passives and Causatives

22.1 The full causative system

Causatives express getting things done through others.

Pattern	Meaning and examples
have + object + bare inf.	authority; instruct someone: *I'll **have my assistant send** you the file.*
have + object + participle	arrange a service: *We **had the piano tuned**.* Also suffer: *He **had his car broken into**.*
get + object + to-inf.	persuade, manage to make: *She **got the landlord to repaint** the flat.*
get + object + participle	informal service/completion: *I must **get this tooth looked at**. We finally **got the report finished**.*
make + object + bare inf.	compel: *The teacher **made us rewrite** the essay.* (passive: *we were made **to** rewrite*)
let + object + bare inf.	allow: *They **let the students leave** early.* (passive: use *be allowed to*)
cause + object + to-inf.	formal, usually negative outcomes: *The fault **caused the engine to overheat**.*
force / compel / oblige + object + to-inf.	stronger than *make*: *The storm **forced us to land** in Denver.*

Common Error

- ✗ *I made my hair cut.* → ✓ *I had/got my hair cut.*
- ✗ *She made him to apologize.* → ✓ *She made him apologize.*
- ✗ *The manager let us to go home.* → ✓ *. . . let us go home.*
- ✗ *I'll have the copies did.* → ✓ *I'll have the copies done.* (past participle, always)

22.2 Middle voice and ergative verbs

Some verbs pair a transitive use with an intransitive one in which the *object* becomes the subject — no passive morphology needed. These are **ergative** verbs:

- *She **opened** the door. / The door **opened**.*
- *They **sell** the tickets online. / The tickets **sold** out in minutes.*
- Common ergatives: *break, begin, boil, burn, close, cook, crash, dry, end, freeze, improve, increase, melt, move, run, shut, start, stop, vary.*

The related **middle construction** describes inherent properties, usually with an adverb: *This fabric **washes well**. The novel **reads like** a thriller. Cheap wine **doesn't keep**.*

Key Point

Three ways to background the agent, in increasing formality: ergative (*the door opened*), *get*-passive (*the door got opened*), *be*-passive (*the door was opened*). The ergative hints that the event happened by itself; the passives imply an agent.

22.3 Passives of prepositional and phrasal verbs

The preposition or particle stays with the verb:

- *The children* ***are*** *well* ***looked after****.*
- *This problem* ***must be dealt with*** *at once.*
- *The old system* ***has been done away with****.*
- *She hates* ***being talked about****.*

22.4 Impersonal and reporting passives revisited

Beyond *It is said that…* (Chapter 10), formal English offers:

- *There + passive + to-infinitive*: ***There are thought to be*** *over a million refugees in the region.*
- Perfect infinitive for anteriority: *The manuscript* ***is believed to have been written*** *around 1200.*
- Progressive infinitive: *He* ***is reported to be recovering*** *well.*
- *seem/appear/prove/turn out* + infinitive as agentless hedges: *The rumours* ***proved to be*** *unfounded.*

Style & Register

Scientific writing has drifted from *The samples were analysed* toward *We analysed the samples*; most journals now welcome the first person for what the authors did, keeping the passive for procedures where the agent is irrelevant. Use whichever puts the *topic* of your paragraph in subject position.

Exercises

Exercise 22.1 Causatives

Rewrite using the causative pattern in brackets.

1. A jeweller is going to engrave the ring for us. (have)
2. The customs officers compelled him to open his suitcase. (make)
3. I persuaded my neighbour to water the plants. (get)
4. Someone stole her credit card details. (have — misfortune)
5. The new rules permit staff to work remotely. (let)

Exercise 22.2 Ergatives and middles

Rewrite without naming any agent, using an ergative or middle construction.

1. Someone closed the museum at five.

2. You can wash this jacket in a machine, and it comes out fine.
3. The publishers sold out the first edition within a week.
4. Something started the fire in the basement. (use *start*)

Exercise 22.3 Advanced passives

Rewrite in the passive, keeping the tense and nuance.

1. People say that the mayor is considering resignation. (two ways)
2. Historians believe that invaders destroyed the temple in 900 AD. (subject + passive + perfect infinitive)
3. Nobody has looked into these allegations.
4. Everyone looked up to the old professor.