

# Process Passives

## **Levels**

Low  
intermediate-intermediate

## **Aims**

Use the passive form in  
a process description

## **Class Time**

30 minutes

## **Preparation Time**

30 minutes


## **Resources**

Copy of a process  
description that also has  
extra information in the  
form of a narrative (see  
Appendix)  
Paper and colored  
pencils  
Transparency of text,  
colored pens, and  
overhead projector  
(OHP).

Students learn to recognize the grammar of passive constructions in a series of activities involving highlighting, color coding, and drawing.

## **Procedure**

1. Make enough copies of a process description text without the title for every student to have one.
2. Hand out the text and ask the students to read it and make suggestions for a suitable title. Write the titles on the board and get the class to choose the one they like best.
3. Show the class the text on the OHP. With a red pen, draw a box around the first noun of the process description, for example,

 Trees are felled in the forest.

Tell the class to look at their text and to draw a red box around all the words that do the same job as "Trees" in the sample sentence (the class may need more than one example).

4. Go around the class asking students to identify words that should have a red box around them on the transparency. Draw a red box around all the words they suggest.
5. Now draw a blue box around the verb form in the example sentence, for example,

Trees  in the forest.

Ask the students to look at their texts and draw blue boxes around all similar types of words.

6. Repeat procedure as in Step 4. Identify all the verb forms on the transparency.
7. Now draw a green box around the complement in the example sentence, for example,

Trees are felled in the forest.

Students follow the same procedure as above, identifying all of the complements by drawing green boxes around them.

8. Now take a black pen and draw a box around the complete process description sentence, for example,

Trees are felled in the forest.

Ask the students to do the same with all the sentences they have identified.

9. Once the students have identified the process description from the narrative padding, ask them to draw simple pictures to illustrate the process described. If the students have a problem in drawing some of the sentences as pictures, then deal with vocabulary at this point (see Nation, 1994).
10. Once the passive has been introduced in the way outlined, the students can then be given a topic, such as, how a table is made, how a shirt is made. Working in groups, they first draw a series of pictures to show the process, then they write the description. Each group can have a different process to describe. Afterwards, they can change groups, show the pictures to the members of another group, and read them the description.

## Caveats and Options

The passive is a very difficult structure for ESL students to use well. I have found that by taking the focus off the grammatical form and putting it onto the stages of the process, getting the students to identify the grammatical category of words needed to show a process, the students end up producing good process descriptions.

## References and Further Reading

Nation, P. (Ed.). (1994). *New ways in teaching vocabulary*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

## Appendix: Sample Text

Last year I went to Canada for my holidays. It is a wonderful country with lots to do and see. I took some organized tours while there and not only enjoyed myself but learned something too. One of my trips was to a paper mill to see paper being made. First, *trees are felled in the forest*. This happens not too far from the mill. *The branches and leaves are removed before the trees are transported to the sawmill*. It didn't take too many people to do all this, as machines do most of the work. We followed the trees to the sawmill, where *the bark is stripped from the trunks* . . .

Note: The process description is highlighted, while the rest of the text is narrative padding.

## Acknowledgments

I first learned something similar to this technique from Pat McEldowney at Manchester University.

## Contributor

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