Episode 060 – Grammar

The passive voice in the present tense to describe an action

The passive voice is a verb form that is used to describe actions or conditions. It changes the perspective of an action or event. While the active sentence emphasizes the subject carrying out an action, a passive construction places emphasis on the action carried out. The agent in a passive sentence is less important, perhaps not even named. The action itself is in the foreground. The subject of a passive sentence is usually the person or thing to which the process is done or happens.

Example:
Harry wird operiert.
(= In this sentence, what is happening to Harry - an operation - is of essence. It is not important who is actually carrying out the operation.)

Forming the passive voice

To form the passive, German uses the helping verb "werden" and a past participle. The helping verb is conjugated in the present tense. The past participle remains unchanged. In a simple declarative sentence, the helping verb is in the second position and the past participle goes to the end of the sentence.

Examples:
*Sie **werden** gleich **operiert**.*
*Hilfe! Ich **werde getötet**!*
*Dr. Anderson **wird** ins Krankenzimmer **gerufen**.*

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To change an active sentence into a passive one, the object moves to the beginning of the sentence or follows the finite verb.

Active	*Dr. Anderson operiert Harry.*	*Ich werde Sie gleich operieren.*
Passive	*Harry wird operiert.*	*Sie werden gleich operiert.* *Gleich werden Sie operiert.*

Including the agent in a passive sentence
If you want to include the actor, cause or agent in a passive construction, that can be done in conjunction with certain prepositions.

"von" + an actor (dative):
Harry wird ***von Dr. Anderson*** *operiert.*
Harrys Haare werden ***von der Krankenschwester*** *geschnitten.*

"durch" + a cause (accusative):
Harry wird ***durch die Operation*** *getötet.*

"mit" + an agent (dative):
Harry wird ***mit einer Spritze*** *beruhigt.*

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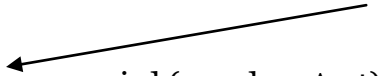
More:

Most accusative verbs can be used in the passive voice. The accusative noun or pronoun in an active sentence becomes a nominative noun in the passive sentence and determines the number and person of the verb. In a passive sentence it is the subject.

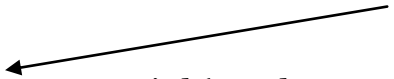
Nominative		Accusative
Der Arzt	operiert	den Mann.



Der Mann	wird (von dem Arzt) operiert.	
Nominative		

By contrast, the objects of dative verbs keep their dative form in a passive sentence. The word order is the same as for accusative verbs. Passive sentence constructions like these have no subject.

Nominative		Dative	
Der Mann	glaubt	dem Arzt	nicht.



Dem Arzt	wird (von dem Mann) nicht geglaubt.	
Dative		

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