Remember to watch the video first! Then read the conversation between Sophie and Jun, an English language student that Sophie met in China. Sophie's helping Jun understand how to use passive forms.

Grammar Snacks

We use the passive, rather than the active, to show that we are more interested in a certain part of the sentence. The passive is usually formed by the verb *to be* + past participle.

Jun

Can you give me some examples of the active and passive?

Sophie

Yes, of course. Here's a passive sentence:

*My room **is being cleaned**.*

'My room' is the main focus of the sentence. The active form would be 'The cleaners are cleaning my room'. This sounds strange because it is obvious that, if you are in a hotel, cleaners would clean your room. So we sometimes use the passive to avoid stating the obvious.

OK, that makes sense. Are there any other uses?

We also use the passive when we don't know who did something, or when it isn't important.

*It's the biggest outdoor elevator in the world, so I'**ve been informed**.*

It doesn't matter who told me.

*I think loads of films **have been made** there.*

The important thing is the films, not the film-makers.

Can you use a passive and also say who did the action?

Yes.

*Avatar **was made by** James Cameron.*

Is the passive formal?

No, not necessarily. It can be formal or neutral or informal.

> *I hope to find everything clean and tidy … you've **been warned**!*

But we often avoid the passive in very informal spoken language, for example, by using *they*.

> ***They based** the scenery in Avatar on the landscape here.*

We don't know exactly who *they* are, but we can guess that it's the people who made the film.

I think I've heard people use *you* a lot too when they don't refer to anyone in particular.

Yes, very good! That's another way of sounding more informal. *You* is a bit different; it means 'people in general'.

> *Parcels **can be collected** from the Post Office between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.* (more formal)
> ***You can collect** parcels between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.* (less formal)

One last question, what about the passive with *get*? Is that informal too?

Yes, when we're speaking informally we also often use *get* rather than the verb *be*.

> *He **was sacked** from his job. = He **got sacked** from his job.*

But be careful, not all verbs can be used in the passive with *get* – only verbs for talking about an action or a change.

> *She **was knocked off** her bike by a bus. = She **got knocked off** her bike by a bus.*
> *Charlie Chaplin **was loved** by millions. ~~Charlie Chaplin got loved by millions.~~*

Phew, OK. I think my brain *has been fried by* all this!

Ah, OK, we'll stop. But look – you're using the passive correctly already!

Watch the video on our website!