

Online German course

Level A1 to C1

Alternative Constructions to the Passive in German

To translate the impersonal pronoun "it" or "one":

Man sagt,... = One says that... / It is said that...

Man hatte ihn davor gewarnt. = He had been warned beforehand. / One had warned him beforehand.

To express something that someone receives, German can use *bekommen* or *kriegen* with a passive meaning when the verb takes a dative object:

Er bekam das Buch geschenkt. = He was given the book (as a gift). / He received the book as a gift.

This could also be expressed as: *Ihm wurde das Buch geschenkt.* (passive construction)

The verb *schenken* ("to give as a gift") takes a dative object, since you give something to someone.

Sie kriegte das Geld ausgezahlt. = She received the money. / She was paid the money that was owed to her.

This could also be expressed as: *Ihr wurde das Geld ausgezahlt.* (passive construction)

The verb *auszahlen* ("to pay out") also takes a dative object, since a sum of money is paid to someone.

The passive can often be replaced by a reflexive construction (*sich* + *verb*):

Mein Verdacht hat sich bestätigt. = My suspicion was confirmed. / My suspicion proved to be correct.

This could also be expressed as: *Mein Verdacht wurde bestätigt.* (passive construction)

Das Buch liest sich schnell. = The book reads quickly. / The book is easy to read.

This could also be expressed as: *Das Buch kann schnell gelesen werden.* (passive construction)

To express the idea of possibility, German can use *sich lassen* + infinitive instead of a passive construction with *können*:

Das lässt sich leicht ändern. = This can easily be changed.

Ein Ende lässt sich nicht absehen. = The end cannot be foreseen. / There is no end in sight.

Construction with *kommen* to express that something is going to happen or is about to be completed

German uses *kommen* together with the noun corresponding to the verb, introduced by *zu*.

Die Verhandlungen kommen heute zum Abschluss. = The negotiations will come to an end today.

Here, the verb *abschließen* ("to conclude") is replaced by its corresponding noun, *der Abschluss* ("the conclusion").

***sein* + *zu* + infinitif expresses possibility or obligation**

The structure *sein* + infinitive with *zu* is used to express either what can be done or what must be done, depending on context.

Die Anträge sind im Rathaus abzuholen. = The forms can be collected at the town hall. OR The forms must be collected at the town hall.

Adjectives ending with *-bar* as an alternative to a passive construction with *kann*

Adjectives ending in *-bar* can replace a passive structure with *kann* to express that something is possible or impossible.

Diese Muscheln sind nicht essbar. = These mussels are not edible. (It is not possible to eat them.)

Das Argument ist nicht widerlegbar. = The argument cannot be refuted. (It is impossible to refute it.)