

Lesson Plan: Impersonal passive in formal writing

Level	Advanced (C1–C2)
Time	60–90 minutes
Skills	Grammar, writing
Focus	It is believed/said/reported/thought that — distancing and objectivity in written English

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Form and use the impersonal passive correctly
- Understand the function: distancing, objectivity, and hedging
- Distinguish between the two main patterns: It is believed that / He is believed to be
- Use the impersonal passive appropriately in academic and journalistic writing

TARGET LANGUAGE (EXAMPLES)

Pattern 1: It + passive + that-clause

- It is believed that the disease originated in bats.
- It has been reported that negotiations have broken down.
- It was thought that the project would be completed by 2025.
- It is estimated that over a million species face extinction.

Pattern 2: Subject + passive + to-infinitive

- The virus is believed to have originated in bats.
- The negotiations are reported to have broken down.
- He is thought to be hiding in the capital.
- The market is expected to recover by Q3.

Common verbs

- believe, say, report, think, estimate, consider, expect, find, know, understand

Function

- Avoids naming a source: hedging and objectivity.
- Typical in: news reporting, academic writing, formal reports.
- Contrast: 'Experts think...' (names the agent) vs. 'It is thought that...' (impersonal, distanced)

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up (10 min)

Task: Transformation drill: change active to impersonal passive.

- 'Scientists say the ice cap is melting.' → 'It is said that...' / 'The ice cap is said to be melting.'

2. Presentation (15 min)

Task: Two patterns: it-pattern and subject + passive + infinitive.

- Tense in the infinitive: to be (present), to have been (past).
- Show common verbs; discuss why some verbs sound more natural than others in this structure.

3. Guided practice (10 min)

Task: Transform 6 direct claims into impersonal passive.

- 'People think she will resign next week.' → 'She is thought to be planning to resign.'
- 'Reports say the accident happened at dawn.' → 'It is reported that the accident occurred at dawn.'

4. Writing task (25 min)

Task: Write a short news report or academic paragraph using impersonal passive at least 4 times.

- Mix both patterns.
- Peer review: does the impersonal passive make the text sound more objective?

5. Editing task (5 min)

Task: Identify and fix 4 impersonal passive errors.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one:

1. Write a short news report using the impersonal passive at least 5 times.
2. Rewrite a paragraph written in the first person using impersonal passives to make it more objective.
3. Find 5 examples of impersonal passive in a newspaper. Identify which pattern is used in each.