

Reporting with passive verbs; It is said that...

A We often use a passive to report what people say, think, etc., particularly if it is not important to mention who is being reported:

- People in the area **have been told** that they should stay indoors.
- Everyone **was asked** to bring some food to the party.

B Another common way of reporting what is said by an unspecified group of people is to use it + **passive verb + that-clause** (see Unit 33 for more on *that*-clauses). Using this pattern can allow us to put important information at the end of the sentence (see Unit 24C):

- It is reported** *that* the damage is extensive. (*compare* The damage is extensive, according to government sources.)
- It has been acknowledged** *that* underfunding contributed to the problem.
- It can be seen** *that* prices rose sharply in September.

Other verbs that can be used in this pattern include:

agree, allege, announce, assume, believe, calculate, claim, consider, decide, demonstrate, discover, establish, estimate, expect, feel, find, hope, intend, know, mention, plan, propose, recommend, reveal, say, show, suggest, suppose, think, understand.

Notice that many other verbs connected with reporting are *not* used in this pattern, including **encourage, inform, persuade, reassure, remind, tell, warn**, but can be used as in A:

- We have been informed** that we have to leave the building. (*but not* It has been informed us...)

These verbs need a personal object before the *that*-clause in an active form (e.g. They have informed us that...).

C An alternative to **it + passive verb + that-clause** is to use **subject + passive verb + to-infinitive** if we want the subject to be the topic of the sentence (see Unit 24C). Compare:

- It is reported** *that* the damage is extensive. *and*
- The damage is reported** *to be* extensive.
- It has been acknowledged** *that* underfunding contributed to the problem. *and*
- Underfunding has been acknowledged** *to have contributed* to the problem.

Most of the verbs listed in the box in B can also be used in this pattern except for **announce, decide, mention, propose, recommend, suggest**.

We can only use **tell** in this pattern when it means 'order'. So we can say:

- I was told** (= ordered) **to go** with them to the railway station.

but not 'The accident was told (= said) to have happened just after midnight'.

D With the verbs **discover, establish, explain, find, know, reveal, show, understand** we can also use **it + passive verb + wh-clause** to report information given or found out:

- It has now been revealed** *who* was responsible for the accident.
- The decision to build the bridge was taken before **it was established** *whether* it was actually needed.

E When a **that-clause** begins **that + there...**, we can make a corresponding passive form **there + passive verb + to be/to have been**. Compare:

- It is thought** (that) **there are** too many obstacles to peace. *and*
- There are thought to be** too many obstacles to peace.
- In 1981 **it was believed** (that) **there were** only two experts on the disease in the country. *and*
- In 1981 **there were believed to be** only two experts on the disease in the country.

We can use the same verbs in this pattern as with **subject + passive verb + to-infinitive** (see C).

- 25.1 Which of the verbs can complete the sentence? Underline one or both. (B & D)
- 1 It is to employ 500 people in the factory. (*expected/ intended*)
 - 2 It has been that the crash was the result of pilot error. (*proposed/ shown*)
 - 3 It was that Mrs Ho would chair the meeting. (*hoped/ explained*)
 - 4 It has been to appoint Dr Smithers as head teacher. (*decided/ suggested*)
 - 5 It has not yet been who was responsible for the error. (*claimed/ explained*)
 - 6 It has now been that the president broke the law in sending troops into the city. (*established/ revealed*)
 - 7 It was to hold new negotiations next month. (*agreed/ announced*)
 - 8 It is to close the library permanently from next April. (*planned/ recommended*)
 - 9 It is that another Moon landing will take place next year. (*assumed/ thought*)
 - 10 It has been how spiders are able to travel across the sea. (*discovered/ said*)

- 25.2 If possible, rewrite these newspaper headlines as passive sentences with the pattern *It + passive verb + that-clause*, as in 1. If this is not possible, write *X* after the headline. (A & B)

- 1 **AGREEMENT THAT UN WILL SEND IN TROOPS** It has been agreed that the UN will send in troops.
- 2 **PATIENTS REASSURED ABOUT HOSPITAL SAFETY**
- 3 **WATER DISCOVERED ON MARS**
- 4 **TERRORISTS BELIEVED TO BE OPERATING IN BERLIN**
- 5 **SPACE SHUTTLE EXPECTED TO RETURN TODAY**
- 6 **EX-PRESIDENT JULIUS REVEALED AS SPY**
- 7 **WARNING GIVEN ABOUT COMPUTER VIRUS**
- 8 **KING SAID TO BE MAKING GOOD RECOVERY**
- 9 **RESTAURANT ESTABLISHED AS SOURCE OF DUBLIN FOOD POISONING OUTBREAK**
- 10 **POLICE TOLD TO WORK LONGER HOURS**

- 25.3 If possible, write two corresponding impersonal sentences from the pieces of information in the text using *it + passive verb + that-clause* in one and *subject + passive verb + to-infinitive* in the other, as in 1. In some cases the second pattern is not possible. (C)

(1) We have discovered that a mechanical fault caused the problem. (2) We don't think that the fault is serious. (3) We expect that it will take several weeks to correct the fault. (4) We have decided to postpone the next rocket launch, and (5) we suggest that the next launch should take place in May.

- 1 It has been discovered that a mechanical fault caused the problem. / A mechanical fault was discovered to have caused the problem.