

Distancing the facts

Reporting with passive verbs

We can report words and actions using the passive in various ways.

6.1 It + passive verb + that clause

It is **said** that Bet Molam, the writer, earns \$1m a year.
It is **reported** that she is living in a rented house in Malibu.
It has been **alleged** that she married her third husband last week.
It is **known** that she has been working on a new book.
It is **said** that the book is based on her experiences in the Far East.
It is **understood** that she has been given an advance of \$500,000.

Other verbs that follow this pattern are:

agree	calculate	discover	hope	show
allege	claim	estimate	know	suggest
announce	consider	expect	presume	suppose
assume	decide	fear	propose	think
believe	declare	feel	recommend	

With some verbs we can use an infinitive instead of a *that* clause.

It was **agreed** to buy the company for €500 million.
It is **hoped** to find a solution to the problem soon.
It has been **decided** to relocate.
It is **planned** to move our premises to Scotland.

6.3 seem and appear

We can use *seem* and *appear* to give information without stating categorically that we know it to be true.

They can be used in two patterns.

1 It + seem/appear + that clause

It **seems** that she's upset.
It **appears** that she's crying.
It **seems** that I made a mistake.
It **appeared** that his car had been stolen.

2 Subject + seem/appear + to infinitive

She **seems to be** upset.
She **appears to be** crying.
I **seem to have made** a mistake.
His car **appears to have been** stolen.

We can make the statement more tentative with the use of *would*.

It **would seem** the problem has been nipped in the bud.
I **would appear** to have mislaid my wallet.

6.2 Subject + passive verb + to infinitive

Bet Molam is **said to earn** \$1m a year. (Present Simple infinitive)
She is **reported to be living** in Malibu. (Present Continuous infinitive)
She is **alleged to have married** her third husband. (perfect infinitive)
She is **known to have been working** on a new book. (perfect continuous infinitive)
The book is **said to be based** on her experiences. (present passive infinitive)
She is **understood to have been given** an advance. (perfect passive infinitive)

Other verbs that follow this pattern are:

allege	consider	know	say	think
assume	estimate	presume	suggest	understand
believe	expect	report	suppose	

Notice this transformation with *there*:

It is **thought** that there has been a plane crash this afternoon.
There is thought to have been a plane crash this afternoon.
It is **estimated** that there are one million unemployed.
There are estimated to be one million unemployed.

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Distancing the facts

Look at these sentences from the newspaper article.

These incidents are reported to have happened last June ...
It is believed that Prince Charles was alerted to the problem ...
It is expected there will be widespread praise ...
It would seem the problem has been nipped in the bud.

These are all ways of giving information without stating categorically that you know it to be true. The writer is putting distance between himself and the facts.

1 Passive constructions

Look at these sentences.

They say he works in the City.
People assume he's earning a lot of money.
Everyone thought he had made his fortune in oil.

These sentences can be expressed in the passive in two ways, beginning with *It* or *He*:

- 1 *It is said that he works in the City.*
It is assumed that he's earning a lot of money.
It was thought that he had made his fortune in oil.
- 2 *He is said to work in the City.*
He is assumed to be earning a lot of money.
He was thought to have made his fortune in oil.

What differences in form do you notice?

2 seem and appear

He appears to have learned his lesson.
The Sun seems to have found its information from a variety of sources.
The Independent seems to be more factual.
It appears that the Prince took the incident seriously.

▶ Grammar Reference p152

Passive constructions

- 1 Rewrite these sentences, beginning with the words in *italics*.
 - 1 It is reported that *the international criminal Jimmy Rosendale* is living in Ireland.
 - 2 People believe that *he* is the head of a gang of bank robbers.
 - 3 Everyone knows that *the gang* has carried out a series of robberies.
 - 4 It is supposed that *they* have escaped with over €1 million.
 - 5 It is thought that *they* are targeting banks in small provincial towns.
 - 6 They say *Jimmy Rosendale* is wanted for questioning by police in five countries.
 - 7 We understand *he* escaped from police custody by bribing a warder.
 - 8 It is assumed that *he* has been involved in criminal activities all his life.
 - 9 People presume that *he* learned his trade from his father.
 - 10 It is alleged that *his father* was the mastermind behind the 2001 gold bullion robbery.

seem and appear

- 2 Change these sentences, beginning with the words in *italics*.
 - 1 It seems *the weather* is changing.
 - 2 It appears that *we* have missed the train.
 - 3 Peter appeared to have been attacked by a bull. (*It*)
 - 4 He seemed to have survived the ordeal. (*It*)
 - 5 It would seem that *the Government* has changed its policy.
 - 6 It appears that *they* are worried about losing the next election.

Reporting the news

- 3 In groups, write a short newspaper article for one of these headlines. Include some of the constructions you have practised.

Athlete fails drugs test and loses medal

PM lied to Parliament over donations from businessman

PRICELESS PAINTING LOST IN FIRE TRAGEDY

TV SOAP STAR RICKY GOES INTO REHAB

ACTRESS CARRIE MOORE TO WED FOR NINTH TIME

CITY TRADER EMBEZZLES £25 MILLION

EX 'DANGEROUS' PRISONER ESCAPES BY HELICOPTER

12-year-old maths genius wins place at Oxford

- 4 **T 6.2** Listen to the news broadcast and use it as a dictation. Elect one student to write on the board while the rest of the class helps.

I think you've spelt that word wrong.
I don't think it was 'would'. I think it was 'had'.