

Reporting with passives; **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 allows 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 was decided that** the meeting should be cancelled. (*or* It was decided to cancel the meeting.)

Also: allege, announce, assume, believe, calculate, claim, consider, demonstrate, discover, establish, estimate, expect, feel, find, know, mention, recommend, reveal, say, show, suggest, suppose, think, understand; agree, decide, hope, intend, plan, propose (can also be followed by a **to-infinitive clause**)

Note that many other verbs connected with reporting are *not* used with **it + passive verb + that-clause**, but can be used as in A:

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

Also: encourage, persuade, reassure, remind, tell, warn

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.

Most of the verbs listed in the first white 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 some verbs 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.

Also: discover, explain, find, know, reveal, show, understand

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.

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

Exercises

25.1 Which of the verbs in brackets can complete the sentence? Underline one or both. **B & D**

- 1 It was to hold new negotiations next month. (*agreed / announced*)
- 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 Ahmadi 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 half of cancer cases are lifestyle-related.
(*established / revealed*)
- 7 It is to employ 500 people in the factory. (*expected / intended*)
- 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 *it*. If not, write *X*.

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

MOON ASTRONAUTS 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

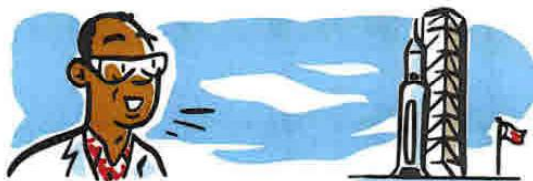
9

RESTAURANT ESTABLISHED AS SOURCE OF FOOD POISONING OUTBREAK

10

POLICE TOLD TO WORK LONGER HOURS

25.3 Write two new sentences for each numbered sentence below, using *it + passive verb + that-clause* in one sentence and *subject + passive verb + to-infinitive* in the other. (The second pattern may not always be 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.*