

# Pronominal Verbs as Passive Voice

*Le rosé se boit frais.*  
Rosé wine is best served chilled.

## LESSON

### What is it?

Instead of using the passive voice, you can use pronominal verbs (se verbs) with a passive meaning. This is very common in French.

### What is it like in English?

In English, pronominal verbs do not exist so you will generally use the passive voice instead but not always:

That's not done. (passive voice) → *Cela ne se fait pas.*

This essay reads well. → *Cette dissertation se lit bien.*

Note the absence of pronouns in English.

### What is it like in French?

#### 1. Pronominal verbs

##### a. Meaning:

- In the present tense, pronominal verbs used as passive voice allow you not to name the agent of the action:

*Ça se dit souvent.* → This is often said. (We don't know who often says it.)

Note that this sentence could also be written without changing its meaning using *on*: *On dit souvent ça*, or the passive voice: *C'est souvent dit.*

- They can also be interpreted as expressing obligation at times:

*Cet emballage se recycle.* = *Cet emballage doit être recyclé.* → This packaging should be recycled.

##### b. Form and agreement:

- This form is only used in the 3rd person singular or plural. The subject of the sentence is always inanimate:

*L'alphabet s'apprend facilement en chantant.* → The alphabet is easy to learn in a song.

- In the *passé composé*, the past participle agrees with the subject:

*Les voitures électriques se sont bien vendues ces derniers mois.*

→ Electric cars sold very well these last months.

#### 2. *Se faire, se laisser, se voir, s'entendre* + verb in the infinitive

##### a. Meaning:

These constructions mean that the subject does not do the action himself/herself but either:

- The subject has something done for him/her:

*Je me suis fait construire une maison.* → I had a house built for me.

- Something is done or happens to someone:

*Elle s'est fait agresser en rentrant chez elle hier soir.*

→ Last night, she got mugged when going back home.

*Il se laisse pousser les cheveux.* → He is letting his hair grow long.

*Je me suis vu refuser une place de parking.* → I was not granted a parking spot.

**b. Form and agreement:**

This form can be used in any person singular or plural and the subject of the sentence is always animate.

*Mon chien s'est fait écraser dans la rue.* → My dog got run over on the street.

*La gagnante s'est vu décerner une médaille en or.* → The winner was given a golden medal.

**Watch out!** Note that in the *passé composé*, the past participles of the above verbs followed by the infinitive do not agree. The subject of the sentence is not doing the action expressed by the infinitive, the past participle is therefore invariable. In the above example, the winner is not the one giving the medal → the past participle cannot agree.

Should you have: *la gagnante s'est vue tomber* → the winner saw herself falling, the past participle would agree as she is the one falling.

## EXERCISES

**1 Underline the correct answer in the following sentences.**

- Nous nous sommes [vu / vus] envahir de moustiques.
- Catherine s'est [laissé / laissée] tomber de fatigue dans le fauteuil.
- Elles se sont [laissé / laissées] conduire gentiment.
- Ils se sont [fait / faits] faire de nouveaux papiers.
- Les enfants se sont [vu / vus] confisquer leur tablette.
- Les chanteurs se sont [entendu / entendus] huer par la foule mécontente.

**2 Transform the following sentences using pronominal verbs.**

**Example:** *On rencontre souvent cette situation.* → *Cette situation se rencontre souvent.*

- On a bien vendu ces livres l'année dernière.  
→ .....
- On emploie de moins en moins le mot « culture » à la télé.  
→ .....
- On utilise de plus en plus d'expressions vulgaires.  
→ .....
- On ne publie plus de journaux intelligents.  
→ .....
- On voit souvent ce style de publicités.  
→ .....
- On écoute facilement cette musique.  
→ .....

**3** Transform the following sentences using *se faire*, *se laisser*, *se voir*, *s'entendre*, *se sentir* + verb in the infinitive.

a. Le sénateur a été insulté par une militante.

→ .....

b. Elle a été rattrapée d'une main ferme.

→ .....

c. Il a été convaincu par ses propos.

→ .....

d. Vous serez bientôt remboursé.

→ .....

e. Ils sont volés en permanence.

→ .....

f. Elles ont été félicitées.

→ .....

g. On leur a dit « bravo ! ».

→ .....

**4** Translate the following sentences into French using pronominal verbs with a passive meaning.

a. I had my hair cut short.

→ .....

b. Rice is bought in bulk in this shop.

→ .....

c. You let yourself be pushed around.

→ .....

d. This soup is eaten cold.

→ .....

e. You got yourself hired.

→ .....

f. The door closes automatically.

→ .....

g. They heard the judge giving (them) a conditional sentence.

→ .....