Table Of Contents:

- Meaning and use of passive reporting structures
- It is thought (that)... / It is said (that)...
- Subject + passive reporting verb + to-infinitive
- The past tense

You have probably noticed that news reporters often use phrases like: “It is believed that...” or “The suspect is known to be...”. In fact, there’s a name for these structures – they’re called **passive reporting structures**.

### Meaning and use of passive reporting structures

In informal language we often use impersonal expressions like:

- *People think (that)...*
- *They say (that)...
- *They expect (that)*...

In newspapers, reports and other more formal writing, this idea is often expressed with a structure based on a passive reporting verb. **Passive structures** hide the source of the information because it is obvious or the source is unimportant or unknown.

- *It is thought (that)...
- *It is said (that)...
- *It is expected (that)...

**It is thought (that)... / It is said (that)...

Consider the following examples:

- *People think that* the clothing chain ‘Looking Good’ is in trouble.
• **They say that** the shop is offering huge discounts.
• **They expect that** the company will close next month.

• **It is thought that** the clothing chain ‘Looking Good’ is in trouble.
• **It is said that** the shop is offering huge discounts.
• **It is expected that** the company will close next month.

The structure here is:

**It + verb ‘to be’ + Past Participle of the reporting verb + that + clause**

Verbs which are often used in this way include:

**assume, believe, consider, estimate, expect, hope, know, report, say, think**

Note: These verbs are most frequently used in simple and perfect tenses in the present and past. Remember that verbs like believe, hope, know, think, understand are not used in continuous tenses.

**Subject + passive reporting verb + to-infinitive**

Using the examples above, we can also use this passive structure:

• ‘Looking Good’ **is thought to be** in trouble.
• The shop **is said to be** offering huge discounts.
• The company **is expected to close** next month.

The structure here is:

**Subject + verb ‘to be’ + Past Participle of reporting verb + to infinitive clause**

Verbs used like this include: believe, expect, report, say, think, understand.
The past tense

When we are talking about a past action, the structure is:

Subject + verb ‘to be’ + Past Participle of reporting verb + to Perfect infinitive clause

Perfect infinitives are used for actions that happened before the reporting.

Compare:

• They believe that competition from online companies was the main reason for its failure.

  Competition from online companies is believed to have been the main reason for its failure.

• They estimate that the company lost about $1 million last year.

  The company is estimated to have lost about $1 million last year.

Check out this video from BBC and see how passive reporting structures are used:

See also:

Passive Voice: Overview

Present Simple Passive