The purpose of this lesson is to present a new way that Passive Voice can be understood and presented to English language learners.

Passive Voice refers to a sentence type in which the actor, performer or executor of an action verb is not the subject of the sentence. In Passive Voice sentences, the subject is typically the recipient or receiver of the action of the verb. The following sentences illustrate Passive Voice in 3 different tenses: Simple Present Tense, Simple Past Tense and Present Continuing Tense.

The assignment is given every semester.
The papers were submitted for grading last week.
Currently, they are being read and evaluated.

Notice in these three sentences, the focus is on ‘the assignment’. Who made the assignment, who submitted the assignment, and who is scoring the assignments are not mentioned. The three following sentences provide that information:

The instructor gives the assignment every year.
The students submitted their papers last week.
The instructor is reading and evaluating them now.

These sentences focus on the doers or agents of the actions described in the sentences. They are Active Voice sentences.

Frequently Passive Voice is taught by providing the learner with an Active Voice sentence and instructing the learner how to reverse the order of the subject (agent) and object (recipient) of the action in the resulting Passive Voice sentence. Such a process is cumbersome; the active voice subject becomes a prepositional phrase, and the active voice object becomes the passive voice subject. This process is also not reflective of the mental process when one actually makes statements using Passive Voice.

A much more direct and meaningful instructional approach to presenting Passive Voice to language learners is to have them focus on the Subject-Verb Combinations as they relate to the
action of a particular verb. When the Subject receives the action of the verb, the sentence is Passive Voice. When the subject does the action of the verb, the sentence is Active Voice.

Using this approach, the learner can be given a verb and asked to construct short sentences combining various subjects with the verb. For example, learners can be given the verb ‘DRIVE’ and asked two questions:

- What are things that are driven?
  - Cars are driven
  - Trucks are driven.
  - Taxis are driven.

- Who are people who drive?
  - Chauffeurs drive.
  - Truck drivers drive.
  - My uncle drives a Taxi.

This kind of activity enables the learner to contrast Passive and Active Voices using short, realistic sentences that reflect how they would be used in actual conversations. Other verbs that could be used with this approach are ‘eat’ ‘drink’, ‘read’, ‘write’, ‘break’, ‘hit’ and many more.

A related English feature which can be taught using the same approach is the distinction between verbs used as adjectives with ‘ED’ endings, and verbs used as adjectives with ‘ING’ endings. This is illustrated with these two sentences.

- The man is bored.
- The man is boring.

The distinction between ‘bored’ and ‘boring’ in these two sentences is similar to the Passive-Active distinction described above. If the man is ‘bored’, he is receiving the boredom. If the man is ‘boring’, he is causing other people to be bored. ‘Bored’ is like a Passive Adjective, and ‘boring’ is like an Active Adjective.