

Broken Prepositional Phrases

There is a class of action verbs that are frequently followed by prepositions that form a unified whole with the verb. The noun or pronoun that follows is the recipient (in other words, it is the direct object). *Most verbs do not function this way, but some do.* Here is the verb first in the active voice, then in the passive forms:

ACTIVE. I prepared for any emergency
PASSIVE. Any emergency was prepared for
PASSIVE. Any emergency was prepared for by me

ACTIVE. They laughed at us
PASSIVE. We were laughed at
PASSIVE. We were laughed at by them

ACTIVE. They will call on you
PASSIVE. You will be called on
PASSIVE. You will be called on by them

ACTIVE. They spoke to me
PASSIVE. I was spoken to
PASSIVE. I was spoken to by them

ACTIVE. They listened to him
PASSIVE. He was listened to
PASSIVE. He was listened to by them

ACTIVE. They looked at us
PASSIVE. We were looked at
PASSIVE. We were looked at by them

When these verbs are changed into the passive voice, the preposition still occupies its position after the passive root. Remember the close relationship between preposition and adverbs; in the passive voice, it is perhaps best to think of these words as adverbs.

Take a second look at the examples in the active voice. Pretty clearly these are prepositional phrases, not simple adverbs with objects. The point is that these prepositional phrases can be broken when the voice of the verb is reversed.