

The Passive Voice with Se – la voz pasiva con se

When we talk in the passive voice, the subject receives the action of the verb. Note the difference between the following sentences in the active and passive voice.

(Active) Ellos firman los documentos.

They sign the documents.

(Passive) Los documentos son firmados por ellos.

The documents are signed by them.

In the active sentence, the subject (ellos) are doing the action (firman los documentos).

In the passive sentence, the subject (documentos) receive the action (son firmados).

When we talk about an action being done without saying who or what does the action, in Spanish we use what is called the reflexive or impersonal **se**.

We often use *they, you, one, or people* in an impersonal or indefinite sense meaning “people in general.” In Spanish, the pronoun **se** + 3rd person singular or plural is used. Notice that in English we can either state the sentence in the passive or active voice, but in Spanish it is stated in the passive voice.

Ex. They sell paper in the stationary store.

Paper is sold in the stationary store.

Se vende papel en la papelería.*

You recycle bottles here.

Bottles are recycled here.

Aquí se reciclan las botellas.**

*If the subject that receives the action is singular, the 3rd person singular is used (él, ella, usted).

**If the subject that receives the action is plural, the 3rd person plural is used (ellos, ellas, ustedes).

Se + 3rd person singular

They sell meat at the meat store.

Se vende carne en la carnicería.

Paper is recycled here.

Aquí se recicla papel.

Spanish is spoken here.

Aquí se habla español.

Se + 3rd person plural

They sell jewelry here.

Se venden joyas aquí.

Bottles are recycled here.

Aquí se reciclan las botellas.

Languages are spoken here.

Aquí se hablan las lenguas.

Note that when using the se passive-voice construction with an action that follows, the second verb is left in the infinitive and the first verb is always in the 3rd person singular.

Can you take pictures?

¿Se permite sacar fotos?

You can't speak English here.

No se puede hablar inglés aquí.