What's it used for

What is Voice? Voice is a grammatical structure that conveys information on whether the sentence subject is doing or receiving the action of the verb. German (like English) has two voices: active (subject doing the action) and passive (subject receiving the action). Guess what--The verb structures you've learned up to this point have all been active voice (didn't know that, did you?).

Universal formula

The passive voice is always formed using *werden and the past participle of the action verb. The tense of the sentence is marked in the * werden; the past participle is a constant.

Example:
- Das Auto wird von der alten Frau verkauft. → Tense =?
- Das Auto wurde von der alten Frau verkauft. → Tense =?
- Das Auto ist von der alten Frau verkauft worden. → Tense =?
- Das Auto war von der alten Frau verkauft worden. → Tense =?
- Das Auto wird von der alten Frau verkauft werden. → Tense =?

When there's a modal verb involved ("the car must be sold"), the modal still requires an infinitive at the end. So:
- Das Auto muß verkauft werden. [=infinitive, in last position as usual]

And when the tense of the modal changes, the tense change is marked in the modal verb:
- Das Auto mußte (= past tense) verkauft (constant) werden (infinitive).

Getting organized

Passive voice is something a child learns around age four or five; we switch from active to passive and passive to active without thinking about it. To be able to do this in German, you must know

- how to conjugate werden in all persons, numbers, and tenses
- and the past participles of action verbs.

What's hard about Passive

The German language has developed ways of using passive that are idiomatic (they have no exact word-for-word equivalent in English).

What can you make of these:
- Es wird hier über Kommunismus diskutiert.
- Freitags wird bei Klaus gefeiert.

When in doubt, look for an “invisible es” as a subject.

Exercise: Create ten active voice sentences (in any tense). Then, keeping the same tense, convert it into passive voice.