Passive Voice Basics:
The "by" Agent

Fill in the blank with the correct option.

1. The novel was written ___ Charles Dickens.
   a) from
   b) with
   c) by
   d) for

2. The car was washed ___. (We don't know who did it.)
   a) by someone
   b) by them
   c) No 'by' phrase is needed.
   d) by people

3. "Guernica" was painted ___ Pablo Picasso in 1937.
   a) from
   b) by
   c) with
   d) of

4. Which sentence sounds more natural?
   a) My wallet was stolen by someone.
   b) My wallet was stolen.
   c) My wallet was stolen by a person.
   d) My wallet was stolen by somebody.

5. The window was broken ___ a ball.
   a) with
   b) by
   c) from
   d) of

6. The letter was written ___ a pen. (the instrument used)
   a) with
   b) by
   c) from
   d) in

7. English is spoken ___ millions of people worldwide.
   a) from
   b) with
   c) by
   d) for

8. The soup was made ___ fresh vegetables. (the ingredients used)
   a) with
   b) through
   c) by
   d) of

9. The criminal was arrested ___. (The police arrested him — this is obvious.)
   a) by the police
   b) No 'by' phrase is needed.
   c) by the law
   d) by officers

10. All the decorations were made ___ hand. Nobody used a machine.
    a) by
    b) with
    c) from
    d) in

11. Which sentence correctly omits the agent?
    a) The book was written by an author.
    b) Rice is grown in many countries.
    c) The car was repaired by a mechanic.
    d) The song was sung by a singer.

12. The house was destroyed ___ a fire last night.
    a) with   b) by
    c) from   d) in

13. "Harry Potter" was written ___ J.K. Rowling.
    a) from   b) by
    c) for   d) with

14. The cake was decorated ___ colourful icing. (the material used)
    a) with   b) by
    c) from   d) in

15. The streets are cleaned every night ___. (city workers do it — obvious)
    a) by workers   b) No 'by' phrase is needed.
    c) by cleaners   d) by the city

16. The package was sent ___ express post. It arrived the next day.
    a) of   b) with
    c) from   d) by

17. Which sentence should include the agent ('by ...')?
    a) The building was constructed in 2010.
    b) The patient was treated at the hospital.
    c) The package was delivered this morning.
    d) The theory of relativity was developed by Einstein.

18. The door was opened ___ a key. (the instrument used)
    a) by   b) for
    c) from   d) with

19. The village was flooded ___ heavy rain.
    a) with   b) from
    c) in   d) by

20. Which is the best version of this sentence? "The homework was corrected ___." (The teacher did it.)
    a) The homework was corrected. (no 'by' phrase)
    b) The homework was corrected by the teacher.
    c) The homework was corrected by her.
    d) The homework was corrected by a person.

Answers

1. c) by

2. c) No 'by' phrase is needed.

3. b) by

4. b) My wallet was stolen.

5. b) by

6. a) with

7. c) by

8. a) with

9. b) No 'by' phrase is needed.

10. a) by

11. b) Rice is grown in many countries.

12. b) by

13. b) by

14. a) with

15. b) No 'by' phrase is needed.

16. d) by

17. d) The theory of relativity was developed by Einstein.

18. d) with

19. d) by

20. a) The homework was corrected. (no 'by' phrase)

Explanations

1. "by" (c)
Use 'by' to introduce the agent (the person who does the action) in passive sentences. 'By Charles Dickens' tells us who wrote the novel.

2. "No 'by' phrase is needed." (c)
When the agent is unknown or unimportant, we simply omit the 'by' phrase. 'The car was washed' is a complete sentence.

3. "by" (b)
Use 'by' before the agent. Picasso is an important, specific agent — we want to say who painted it.

4. "My wallet was stolen." (b)
When the agent is unknown or vague (someone, people, somebody), we usually omit the 'by' phrase. 'My wallet was stolen' is more natural.

5. "by" (b)
Use 'by' when the agent is the cause or thing that performed the action. The ball caused the window to break.

6. "with" (a)
Use 'with' for the instrument or tool used to do something. Use 'by' for the agent (person/thing that does the action). The pen is the tool, not the agent.

7. "by" (c)
Use 'by' to introduce who performs the action. Here, 'millions of people' is the agent who speaks English.

8. "with" (a)
Use 'with' for ingredients you can see or taste in the final product. Compare: 'made from' is used when the original material is completely transformed (e.g., wine is made from grapes). Here the vegetables are visible in the soup, so 'with' is correct.

9. "No 'by' phrase is needed." (b)
When the agent is obvious from context (police arrest criminals, doctors treat patients), we often omit the 'by' phrase.

10. "by" (a)
'By hand' is a fixed expression meaning 'manually, without machines'. Here 'by' indicates the method/manner, not a person. Other common expressions: by post, by email, by mistake.

11. "Rice is grown in many countries." (b)
'Rice is grown in many countries' is correct because 'by farmers' is obvious and unnecessary. The other options have obvious agents that should be omitted.

12. "by" (b)
Use 'by' when the agent is a force or cause (fire, earthquake, flood). The fire caused the destruction.

13. "by" (b)
Use 'by' to introduce a specific, important agent. We include 'by J.K. Rowling' because the author is significant information.

14. "with" (a)
Use 'with' for the material or tool used. Icing is the material used to decorate, not the agent performing the action.

15. "No 'by' phrase is needed." (b)

It's obvious that city workers/cleaners clean the streets. We omit the 'by' phrase when the agent is predictable.

16. "by" (d)

'By express post' indicates the method of delivery. 'By' is used for means of transport or communication: by post, by email, by car, by air.

17. "The theory of relativity was developed by Einstein." (d)

We include 'by Einstein' because the agent is important and specific. The other sentences have obvious or unimportant agents.

18. "with" (d)

Use 'with' for the instrument or tool. A key is the tool used to open the door, not the person/agent.

19. "by" (d)

Use 'by' for natural forces and causes (rain, wind, earthquake). Heavy rain is the cause/agent of the flooding.

20. "The homework was corrected. (no 'by' phrase)" (a)

Since it's obvious that a teacher corrects homework, the 'by' phrase is unnecessary. Omitting it makes the sentence cleaner and more natural.