

How to Use 'Let' and 'Make'

Let

Subject + let + object + bare infinitive (infinitive without 'to')

'Let' can mean 'allow' or 'give permission':

- David's mother let him use her car.
- Our boss let us leave early.

We can also use 'let' to mean 'allow' in the sense of 'make something possible':

- This student card lets you book discount flights.
- You can buy a pass which lets you visit all the art galleries more cheaply.

Let's + infinitive is often used to make a suggestion:

- Let's go to the cinema tonight.
- Let's get some coffee.

(Although 'let's' is a contraction of 'let us', we don't use 'let us' in this situation).

We don't use 'let' in the passive.

Make

Subject + make + object + bare infinitive (infinitive without 'to')

'Make' can mean 'force someone to do something that he or she doesn't want to do':

- His mother made him clean his room.
- The teacher made us study very hard.

It can also be used to mean 'cause someone to do something' (the thing can be good or bad):

- That film made me cry.
- My brother often makes me laugh.

If we use 'make' in the passive, we use the infinitive with 'to' instead of the bare infinitive:

- She was made to work on Saturday, even though she hated working at weekends.

We can also use subject + make + object + adjective. This means 'cause the object to be the adjective' (the adjective can be good or bad):

- Her story made me really happy.
- The traffic jam made us late.

Choosing 'let' or 'make'

Remember, we use 'let' when we mean 'allow'. It's usually something the person wants to do:

- My boss let me leave early (I wanted to leave early, and the boss gave me permission).

We use 'make' when we mean 'force' or 'cause'. It's often something the person doesn't want to do:

- My boss made me stay late (I didn't want to stay, but I had to).

When 'make' means 'cause' it can be something good or bad:

- My brother made me laugh.

Laughing is a good thing, BUT laughing isn't something I wanted to do that my brother gave me permission for. Instead it's something that he caused.

We can only use 'make + object + adjective'. We can't use 'let' in this way.