

Present Simple and Continuous vs Past Simple and Continuous

| Present Simple | Present Continuous |
|--|---|
| <p>Things which are always true:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water boils at 100 degrees. | <p>Things which are happening at the moment of speaking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The water is boiling now, so you can put in the pasta. |
| <p>Permanent situations (or nearly permanent; true for a few years at least):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julie lives in London. | <p>Temporary situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julie is living in Paris for a few months (usually she lives in London). <p>Situations which are slowly changing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm getting better and better at speaking English. |
| <p>Habits or things we do regularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I drink coffee every morning. | <p>Temporary or new habits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm drinking too much coffee these days because I'm so busy at work. <p>Annoying habits (usually with 'always'):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My flatmate is always leaving the kitchen in a mess! |
| <p>Future events which are part of a timetable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My plane leaves at eight tonight. <p>To talk about the future after certain words ('when' 'until' 'after' 'before' 'as soon as'):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'll call you when I get home. | <p>Definite future plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm meeting John after class today. |

Past Simple

We use it with finished actions, states or habits in the past when we have a finished time word (yesterday, last week, at 2 o'clock, in 2003).

- I **went** to the cinema yesterday.
- We **spent** a lot of time in Japan in 2007.

Past Continuous

An action in the past which overlaps another action or a time. The action in the past continuous starts before and often continues after the other shorter action or time.

- I **was walking** to the station when I met John. (I started walking before I met John, and maybe I continued afterwards.)
- At three o'clock, I **was working**. (I started before three o'clock and finished after three o'clock.)

We use it with finished actions, states or habits in the past when we know from general knowledge that the time period has finished.

This includes when the person we are talking about is dead.

- Leonardo **Painted** the Mona Lisa.
- The Vikings **invaded** Britain.

To emphasise that something lasted for a while. We usually use it with time expressions like 'all day' or 'all evening' or 'for hours'.

- I **was working** in the garden all day.
- He **was reading** all evening.

For stories or lists of events, we often use the past simple for the actions in the story and the past continuous for the background.

- He **went** to a café. People were chatting and music was playing. He **sat** down and **ordered** a coffee.

Habits in the past, usually annoying. We often use 'always', 'constantly' or 'forever' here.

- He **was always leaving** the tap running.
- She **was constantly singing**.

Choose the present simple, present continuous, past simple or past continuous of the verbs in brackets to complete the sentences.

1. We _____ (eat) dinner at 8pm last night (we started eating at 7:30).
2. She _____ (not/study) at the moment.
3. We _____ (watch) TV when we _____ (hear) a loud noise.
4. We often _____ (go) to the cinema.
5. Julie _____ (be) in the garden when Laurence _____ (arrive).
6. He usually _____ (not/do) his homework.
7. They _____ (not/eat) rice every day.
8. _____ (you/like) spicy food?
9. They _____ (study) now.
10. Yesterday I _____ (go) to the Post Office, _____ (buy) some fruit at the supermarket and _____ (read) a book in the park in the afternoon.
11. _____ (she/go) to Scotland often?
12. _____ (he/eat) now?
13. I _____ (walk) along the road when I _____ (meet) an old friend.
14. She _____ (work) every Sunday.
15. We _____ (not/sleep) now.
16. My ex-boyfriend _____ (be) so annoying! He _____ (always miss) the bus and arriving late.
17. A: What _____ (do) at 3pm yesterday?
B: I _____ (clean) my house.
18. Last year I _____ (visit) Paris and Rome.
19. They _____ (have) dinner when the police _____ (come) to the door.
20. It _____ (be) a day in December. Snow _____ (fall) , children _____ (sing) carols and people _____ (do) their Christmas shopping.
21. Why _____ (cry) when I _____ (arrive)?
22. When he _____ (get) home we started to eat dinner.
23. I _____ (enjoy) my book so much that I _____ (not/notice) that the train had stopped.
24. David _____ (not/sleep) when I _____ (arrive) , he _____ (study).
25. Mr Black _____ (not/work) in the garden at 10pm last night.