

Past Continuous

1 Introduction

The Past Continuous means that at a time in the past we were in the middle of an action.



2 Form

The Past Continuous is the past tense of be + an -ing form.

POSITIVE

I/he/she/it was playing
you/we/they were playing

NEGATIVE

I/he/she/it wasn't playing
you/we/they weren't playing

QUESTION

was I/he/she/it playing?
were you/we/they playing?

Soft music was playing. People were walking in the park.

I wasn't dreaming. I really was in New York City.

Why did you give our secret away? What were you thinking of?

Was Matthew already waiting for you when you got there?

3 Use

Read this conversation.

Melanie: *I rang at about three yesterday afternoon, but you weren't in. I didn't know where you were.*

David: *Oh, I was helping Mike. We were repairing his car. It took ages. We were working on it all afternoon.*

Melanie: *It was raining. I hope you weren't doing it outside.*

David: *No, we were in the garage. So I didn't get wet. But I'm afraid I got oil all over my new trousers.*

Melanie: *Why were you wearing your new trousers to repair a car?*

David: *I don't know. I forgot I had them on.*

It was raining at three o'clock means that at three o'clock we were in the middle of a period of rain. The rain began before three and stopped some time after three. *We were working all afternoon* means that the action went on for the whole period. David is stressing the length of time that the work went on.

We use the continuous with actions. We do not normally use it with state verbs (see Unit 7). For states we use the Past Simple.

I didn't know where you were. NOT *I wasn't knowing...*

Practice

A Form (2)

Today is the first of January, the start of a new year. Most people are feeling a bit tired.

What were they doing at midnight last night?

Use these verbs: *dance, drive, listen, watch, write*

Use these phrases after the verb: *an essay, his taxi, in the street, television, to a band*



► Claire was listening to a band.

1 Trevor and Laura

2 Vicky and Rachel

3 Tom

4 Andrew

B Form (2)

Complete the conversation. Put in the Past Continuous forms.

Jessica: ► I was looking (I / look) for you, Vicky. I'm afraid I've broken this dish.

Vicky: Oh no! What (1) (you / do)?

Jessica: (2) (I / take) it into the kitchen. I bumped into Emma. (3) (she / come) out just as

(4) (I / go) in.

Vicky: I expect it was your fault. (5) (you / not / look) where (6) (you / go).

Jessica: Sorry. I'll buy you another one as soon as I have some money.

C Use (3)

What can you say in these situations? Add a sentence with the Past Continuous to say that an action lasted a long time.

► You had to work yesterday. The work went on all day.

I was working all day.

1 You had to make phone calls. The calls went on all evening.

2 You had to wait in the rain. The wait lasted for half an hour.

3 You had to make sandwiches. This went on all afternoon.

4 You had to sit in a traffic jam. You were there for two hours.

5 Your neighbour played loud music. This went on all night.