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Present simple and present continuous

Why is the girl in the photo smiling?



A bowler **smiles** at her friends after a good shot.

Why **is** the girl in the photo **smiling**? It **sounds** like an easy question: she's **having** a good time with friends and she's **feeling** good after a good shot. But psychologists **are** forever **arguing** about this question.

Some **believe** that smiling **is** an individual act: we **smile** because we **feel** happy ... unless we're **trying** to hide our emotions. Others **claim** that we **smile** to build social relationships. Some animals **use** a **grin** to show that they **don't want** to fight, for example, so perhaps our smile **serves** the same function.

So who's right? In one study, researchers filmed people bowling. If you **watch** people doing a very social activity like this, it **looks** as if they're **always smiling**. They **stop** smiling only when they **are concentrating** on their next shot. But when **do** they **start** smiling again? After each good shot, the researchers took photographs to identify when the smile **starts** – while the player **is** still **looking** down the alley or a few seconds later when they **turn** round to share their happiness with the group?

And the results? Only around 4% of bowlers **smile** with their backs to their friends. Far more – 42% – **smile** as soon as they **turn** round. The conclusion: we usually **smile** not because we're happy, but because we're friendly.



- 1 What are the two theories of smiling?
- 2 Why did the researchers choose a bowling alley?

Answers: 1 We smile because we feel happy; we smile to build social relationships. 2 Because bowling is a very social activity.

Present simple and present continuous

Present simple

- 1 Use the present simple to refer to facts and specific routines or habits, and with adverbs of frequency.
*We **smile** because we **feel** happy.*
*We usually **smile** because we're friendly.*

- 2 We usually use the present simple with state verbs such as *think, feel, believe, know, seem, appear, like, consist, have* and *belong*.
*Some **believe** that smiling is an individual act.*

- 3 We also often use the present simple to describe events shown in a picture, to make them seem more immediate and alive. For the same reason, we usually use the present simple in news headlines and in television or radio commentaries on sports or other ongoing events.
- A bowler **smiles** at her friends.*
*And Jake **heads** the ball to Gallant – who **kicks** ... and it's a goal!*

Prince William visits local hospital.

- 4 Use the present simple in the expressions *Here come(s)* ... and *There go(es)* ...
- There **goes** Mike, looking as cheerful as usual.*
 NOT *There is going Mike, ...*

TIP

Use the present simple with verbs like *promise*, *agree*, *assure* and *demand*, which are used to perform the act they describe.

*I **promise** I won't be late.* (I am using these words to make a promise.)

Present continuous

- 5 Use the present continuous to refer to activities, situations and changes happening now / around now.
- ... while the player **is still looking** down the alley ...*
- 6 We can use the present continuous with indefinite adverbs of frequency (e.g. *always*, *constantly*, *forever*) to refer to regular behaviour which is typical, habitual and predictable.
- Psychologists **are forever arguing** about this question.*
- We sometimes use the present continuous in this way to criticise or express disapproval.
- Sally's **always losing** things. She should be more careful.*
- 7 When we describe an action or event with the present simple, we can use the present continuous to refer to activities, situations and changes happening around the same time.
- If you **watch** a group of friends bowling, it **looks** as if they're **always smiling**.*

Present simple or present continuous

TIP

The present simple is much more common than the present continuous, and it is the best form to use if you are not sure.

- 8 We usually use the present simple to refer to situations which we see as permanent, and the present continuous to refer to situations which we see as temporary. Note the difference:

*Tom **lives** in Rome. He **works** as a lawyer for a big Italian company.* (Rome is his permanent base.)
*Jane **is living** in Rome at the moment. She **is working** as an English teacher.* (She is in Rome temporarily, e.g. for one year.)

- 9 When we tell stories or to give instructions, we use the present simple to describe the shorter actions and events and the present continuous to describe the longer situations or background activity.
- Gavin and his wife **are sitting** at home one evening when the telephone **rings** and their lives **change** for ever.*
*First, you **fry** the onion in a little oil. While the onion's **cooking**, you **chop** the vegetables.*

- 10 Although we usually use the present simple with state verbs (see 2 above), we can use the present continuous if we are talking about an ongoing present process rather than a fact.
- She's **feeling** good after a good shot.*

Some verbs (e.g. *hear*, *see*, *think*, *appear*) can be state verbs or action verbs, but with a different meaning.

*What **do** you **think** of Jan's new hairstyle?*
 (= What's your opinion about it?)
*I'm **thinking** of taking a few days off.*
 (= I'm considering the possibility of doing it.)

TIP

In the present simple, *see* and *hear* have different meanings.

*I **see** him every day.* (= I see)
*I **see** what you mean.* (= I understand)
*I **hear** you loud and clear.* (= I hear)
*I **hear** you're coming to stay.* (= I have been told)

- 11 We use the present simple with verbs like *hope* and *look forward to* in formal situations, and we use the present continuous if we want to sound more informal and less direct.
- We very much **hope** you will be able to attend.*
*We're really **hoping** you'll be able to come.*
- I **look forward to** hearing from you in the near future.*
*I'm **looking forward to** hearing from you soon.*

Practice

A Underline the correct option.

- Ice melts / is melting above 0°C.
- Have you got an umbrella? It starts / is starting to rain.
- Gabriela looks lovely today – she wears / is wearing her new dress.
- Paul's daughter lives in Spain – he visits / is visiting her two or three times a year.
- There goes / is going Maggie, on her way to work, I suppose.
- Don't worry, I promise / am promising I won't tell anyone your secret.
- This carpet gets / is getting very dirty – maybe we should wash it.
- That's great tennis from Thompson as he hits / is hitting another winning shot into the corner!



B Complete the sentences, using the present simple or present continuous form of the verb given.

- always go
 - Sue and I always go to the cinema on Thursdays.
 - I saw Mary in the travel agent's this afternoon – she 's always going on holiday!
- play
 - Giovanni plays football for a local team.
 - Anthony is playing in goal today because our normal goalkeeper is injured.
- have
 - I am having lunch at the moment. Can I phone you back in half an hour?
 - The hotel has 14 double rooms, all with bathrooms.
- wonder
 - We wonder whether we should buy a birthday present for Lucie.
 - I wonder what time the next train is.
- come
 - Look – here comes the bus, at last!
 - More and more people are coming to live here these days.
- (you) think
 - You look worried – what do you think about?
 - Why is Jim so happy today? Is it his birthday or something?
- stand
 - St Thomas's Tower stands at the entrance to the harbour.
 - A strange woman was standing outside the house. Do you know her?
- work
 - It's 8.30 on a hot July evening. Gordon Stevens is working late in his office, when suddenly ...
 - These tablets work better if you take them with food.

C Underline the correct option. Sometimes both options are possible.

- John regrets / is regretting the way he behaved yesterday.
- Mistakes like that cost / are costing the company a lot of money.
- Sue has / is having the flu, so she's off work today.
- It's a very simple camera. You just press / are just pressing the button and that's it!
- My neighbours are really noisy – they always play / are always playing loud music late at night.
- Annie's car doesn't sound / isn't sounding very good. She should take it to a garage.
- I don't have / am not having much time right now. Can we talk tomorrow instead?
- The company hopes / is hoping to expand into Europe in the next few years.

D Complete the sentences with the present simple or present continuous form of the verbs in brackets.

- I understand a little Italian, but I can't speak it. (understand)
- My cousins are going skiing nearly every winter. (usually go)
- Here lives Michelle. Maybe she wants to talk to me. (come)
- I invited Jill to the party – she is coming to it. (look forward)
- Does the bank what time the bank opens? (you know)
- This bed is 180 centimetres by 210 centimetres – I think it's too big. (measure)
- A: What is?
B: My homework. Don't interrupt me. (do)
- I just heard Wendy's news – she is expecting a baby. (expect)
- The first thing to do is peel the potatoes. Then you boil them in salted water for about 20 minutes. (boil)
- And at the line ... Powell won – in 9.64 seconds – a new personal best! (win)