

## 9

## Past Simple – Past Continuous



First Naomi planted the flowers and then she watered them.



George played football with his dad yesterday.



He was walking down the street when he slipped on a banana skin.



The teacher was helping Sue while she was doing the exercise.

## Past Simple Form: regular verb + -ed

Affirmative	Negative
I/You/He/She/It/We/They looked/ate	I/You/He/She/It/We/They did not/didn't look/did not/didn't eat
Interrogative	Short Answers
Did I/you/he/she/it/we/they look/eat?	Yes, I/you/he/she/it/we/they did. No, I/you/he/she/it/we/they didn't.

## Use

We use the **past simple** for:

- an action that happened at a **definite time** (stated or implied) in the past.  
*They left for Paris a week ago.*
- actions that happened **immediately one after the other**.  
*She cleared the table, did the washing-up and went straight to bed.*
- habits or states which are **finished**.  
*Patrick rode his bike every day when he was a child.*
- past actions which **won't take place again**.  
*Da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa. (He's now dead. He won't be painting any more.)*

The time expressions we use with the **past simple** are: **yesterday, then, when, How long ago ... ?, last night/week/month/year/Friday/May, etc., two days/months, etc. ago, in 2010, etc.**

## Notes:

- When there are two past continuous forms in a sentence with the same subject, we can avoid repetition by just using the present participle (-ing form) of the second verb and leaving out the second subject as well as the verb was/were.  
*Tom was having breakfast and reading the morning paper. (= Tom was having breakfast and he was reading the morning paper).*
- The **past continuous** is not used for repeated actions in the past. The past simple is used instead.  
*When Mark was younger, he went jogging every day. (NOT: ... he was-going jogging every day.)*

## Past Continuous Form: was/were + main verb + -ing

Affirmative	Negative
I/He/She/It was running	I/He/She/It was not/wasn't running
We/You/They were running	We/You/They were not/weren't running
Interrogative	Short Answers
Was I/he/she/it running?	Yes, I/he/she/it was. No, I/he/she/it wasn't.
Were we/you/they running?	Yes, we/you/they were. No, we/you/they weren't.

## Use

We use the **past continuous** for:

- an action that was **in progress** at a stated time in the past. We don't mention when the action started or finished.  
*Joe was watching a cartoon show on Sunday at noon.*
- two or more **simultaneous actions** in the past.  
*Sue was listening to music while she was tidying her room.*
- an action which was **in progress** when another action interrupted it. We use the past continuous for the action in progress (the longer action), and the past simple for the action which interrupted it (the shorter action).  
*Alex was sleeping when a loud noise woke him.*
- to describe the **atmosphere, setting, etc.** and to **give background information** to a story.  
*It was an ordinary morning. We were getting ready for school while Mum was making breakfast.*

The time expressions we use with the **past continuous** are: **while, when, as, all day/night/morning, all day yesterday, etc.**

**1**

Match the sentences (1-8) with the correct description (a-h), as in the example.

**1** **C** Lilly was cooking while her brother was studying.

**2** Susan rode her bike to school when she was little.

**3** First Mum had a shower and then she prepared dinner.

**4** It was a strange night. The dogs were howling and the cats were miaowing for hours.

**5** I was playing tennis at 6:00 pm yesterday.

**6** C. S. Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

**7** James washed his car yesterday.

**8** Linda was sleeping when the fire broke out.

**a** an action which was in progress at a stated time in the past

**b** background information to a story

**c** two or more simultaneous actions in the past

**d** a past action which won't take place again

**e** actions that happened immediately one after the other

**f** an action that happened at a definite time in the past

**g** an action which was in progress when another action interrupted it

**h** a past state or habit which is finished

**2**

Fill in the gaps using the verb in brackets in the past simple or the past continuous.

1 A: You didn't call (not/call) last night!  
B: No, I ..... (help) my sister with her wedding plans and I ..... (get) home after midnight.

2 A: When I ..... (drive) home the other night, I ..... (see) a terrible accident.  
B: Oh my! ..... (you/call) the police?

3 A: Who ..... (mow) their lawn this morning between 7 and 8 o'clock?  
B: Our neighbour, Larry. He ..... (wake) me up, too!

4 A: Great cake! ..... (you/make) it?  
B: No, I ..... (get) this one at the shop. While I ..... (bake) the cake in the oven, I ..... (talk) to a friend on the phone and I ..... (not/take) it out in time. So, it ..... (burn).

5 A: Guess who I ..... (bump into) this morning! Jessica. She ..... (ride) her bike to work, while I ..... (sit) in my car, stuck in traffic.  
B: Lovely! ..... (you/arrange) for us to get together?

6 A: What ..... (you/do) when the fire started?  
B: I ..... (study) in my room.

**3**

Underline the correct item.

1 He got up/was getting up and was leaving/left the room without saying a word.

2 It was a cold Monday morning. It snowed/was snowing and a cold wind was blowing/blew.

3 Ben didn't go/wasn't going to school yesterday, so he missed/was missing the trip to the museum.

4 The students wrote/were writing a test when the fire alarm was going/went off.

5 Jane was listening/listened to music while she was jogging/jogged in the park.

6 Leonardo da Vinci was painting/painted famous works of art.

**4**

Put the verbs in brackets into the past simple or the past continuous.

Last Sunday evening, my brother and I 1) were (be) home alone, as our parents 2) ..... (visit) an aunt who was sick at the time. It 3) ..... (rain) very heavily outside, and we 4) ..... (enjoy) a quiet night at home. Suddenly, the lights 5) ..... (start) flickering and after a few minutes, they 6) ..... (go) out. I 7) ..... (try) calling our dad, but as his phone 8) ..... (ring), the line 9) ..... (go) dead. Chris and I were worried. We 10) ..... (be) alone in the dark, the wind 11) ..... (howl) outside and we 12) ..... (not/have) any way to communicate with our parents. At that moment, we 13) ..... (hear) Mum's voice calling us from the front door. We 14) ..... (know) then that we 15) ..... (be) safe!

**7** Put the verbs into the *past simple* or the *past continuous* and join the sentences using *as*, *when* or *while*.

- 1 She/drive to work. Her car/break down. (when)  
*She was driving to work when her car broke down.*
- 2 Vicki/water the garden. Nick/wash the dog. (while) .....
- 3 Mary/swim in the lake. She/feel a sharp pain in her ankle. (as) .....
- 4 Frank/jog in the park. A dog/start chasing him. (when) .....
- 5 Andrea/wait at the bus stop. She realised that a strange woman/stare at her. (as) .....
- 6 James/read his email. He/have his morning coffee. (while) .....
- 7 Sarah/sleep. The earthquake/start. (when) .....
- 8 Barbara/watch a film. John/surf the Net. (while) .....

**8** Underline the correct item.

It was a lovely day in spring, and my sister and I 1) were hiking/would hike in the mountains. As it was my first time hiking, I 2) didn't get used to/wasn't used to walking long distances without stopping, so we 3) needed/were needing to take breaks every thirty or forty minutes.

We 4) rested/were resting under a shady tree, when we 5) heard/would hear a growling sound. We 6) used to turn/turned around and 7) were seeing/saw a huge brown bear approaching us.

In panic, we 8) threw/were throwing our backpacks on the ground and 9) were starting/started to run away. After a few minutes, we 10) looked/would look back to check if the bear 11) used to chase/was chasing us. Luckily, the bear was busy eating the food from our backpacks, and 12) wasn't caring/didn't care about us!

Feeling safe, we 13) were used to walking/walked back to town, where we 14) would tell/told everyone of our unusual experience.

**Speaking**

**10** Look at the pictures. In pairs, describe the scene using the *past simple* and the *past continuous*. Use the ideas below to help you.

- sun/shine
- my family and I/camp by the lake
- we/enjoy the view
- wolf/approach and start growling
- we/try not to panic
- we/not move at all
- after some minutes/wolf go away
- we/be a bit scared but relieved



*It was a bright day in spring. The sun was shining...*

**Writing**

**11** Using your ideas from the Speaking activity above, write a story entitled 'An Unwelcome Visitor'. Use the *past simple* and the *past continuous*. Use Ex. 8 as a model.