

Past Continuous vs Past Simple

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We use the **past continuous**:

- for an action which was in progress at a stated time in the past.
The girls **were playing** volleyball at five o'clock in the afternoon.
(When did they start? We don't know.)
- for two or more actions happening at the same time in the past.
The children **were studying** while their mother **was cooking**.
- for an action which was in progress when another action interrupted it. The action that interrupted it is in the past simple.
Mary **was cooking** when he **burnt** her hand.

Time expressions used with the past continuous:

while, when, as, all day / night / morning, all day yesterday, etc.

We use the **past simple**:

- for an action that took place at a specific time in the past.
Simon **went** to camp **last month**.
(When did he go to camp? Last month.)
- actions which happened immediately one after the other in the past.
First she **made** the pizza, then she **put** it in the oven.

Time expressions used with the past simple:

ago, yesterday, last month / week / year, in 2005, then, etc.

5 Underline the correct item.

- 1 I **watched** / **was watching** a DVD when my cat **jumped** / **was jumping** on me.
- 2 She **was buying** / **bought** a new dress last month.
- 3 Greg **was sleeping** / **slept** while Joanne **listened** / **was listening** to her MP3 player.
- 4 Mum **cooked** / **was cooking** dinner when someone **knocked** / **was knocking** on the door.
- 5 Sue **was watering** / **watered** the flowers when it **started** / **start** to rain.
- 6 They **were walking** / **walked** to school last Monday because there was no bus.
- 7 I **ate** / **was eating** a sandwich while my parents **drank** / **were drinking** coffee.

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

- 1 Jack **was playing** (play) a video game when his brother, Tom, **entered** (enter) the room.
- 2 I (study) for my English test when my mother (come) home from work.
- 3 I (read) a book when my sister (leave) for the cinema.
- 4 Emma (wash) the dishes when the telephone (ring).
- 5 I (write) an email when the lights (go) out.

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

- 1 A: What 1) *were the children doing* .. (the children/do) when you 2) *returned*
(return) home last night?
B: Kate 3) (watch) a DVD and Andrew
4) (do) his homework.
- 2 A: How 1) (Anne/break) her leg?
B: She 2) (ride) her horse when she
3) (fall) and 4)
(land) on her leg.
A: 5) (she/go) to hospital?
B: Yes, she did.
- 3 A: When 1) (you/see) Peter?
B: While I 2) (do) my shopping at the supermarket.
- 4 A: I 1) (call) you last night but you
2) (not/answer). Where were you?
B: I 3) (jog) in the park.
- 5 A: 1) (you/hear) what happened to George?
B: No! Is he OK?
A: Well, he 2) (ride) his bike to school
when a cat 3) (jump) out in front of
him. He 4) (try) to stop but he
5) (fall) against a wall. Luckily, he
6) (not/be) hurt.

8 Read the letter and write the missing words. Write one word on each line.

Dear Georgia,

I'm writing to you from my hotel room 1) *in* Berlin. You can't imagine what happened to me yesterday! I was walking in Mitte at around noon 2) it started raining. 3) I was running back to the hotel, I saw a famous actor who was eating in a restaurant. I went in and 4) hello and he gave me two tickets to see his new film. Isn't that great?

That's all for now. See you 5) I get back!

Love,
Rachel