

## 2.2 Past Simple and Past Continuous

### Past Simple

Suddenly all the electricity **went out**.

*I **thought** we really must do something about this.*

*She **walked** into the room, **made** herself a cup of coffee and **turned on** her computer.*

#### Form:

regular verbs: infinitive + -ed

Many of the most frequently used verbs have an irregular form, e.g. *think* - *thought*, *go* - *went*.

#### Use:

We use the Past Simple to talk about completed actions and events in the past. We also use the Past Simple to describe a sequence of completed events and actions.

### Past Continuous

*It **was snowing** all last night.*

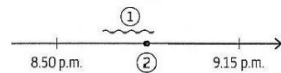
*About 9 o'clock we **were just watching** TV.*

#### Form:

was/were + verb + -ing

#### Use:

- We use the Past Continuous to talk about actions and situations happening at a specific moment in the past.  
**A:** *What **were you doing** at 10 o'clock this morning?*  
**B:** *I **was waiting** at the airport for the visitors to arrive.*
- We use the Past Continuous in a story to give 'background' details, e.g. the weather, the location, the season, or extra details about someone's life at the time.  
*She **was spending** the summer studying English in London when she met him.*
- We use the Past Continuous to talk about a situation or action in progress which is interrupted by another event or action (expressed in the Past Simple).  
1 *About 9 o'clock last night we **were just watching** TV.*  
2 *Suddenly all the electricity **went out**.*



*I **was talking** on the mobile when the battery **ran out**.*

- 4 We use the Past Continuous with *while* to talk about two events or actions happening at the same time.

*She **was preparing** the presentation **while** he **was organising** the chairs in the meeting room.*

- 5 We generally use *when* before the Past Simple for actions and events of a shorter duration.

*I **was talking** on the mobile **when** the battery **ran out**.*

- 6 We generally use *while* with the Past Continuous for actions and situations of a longer duration.

***While** I **was reading** the report, I **made** notes about the main points.*

We often use the Past Simple and the Past Continuous tenses together.

Notice the important difference between these two sentences:

*When we arrived, Janet **was giving** her presentation.*

(Janet started her presentation **before** they arrived.)

*When we arrived, Janet **gave** her presentation.*

(Janet started her presentation **after** they arrived.)

#### Note: stative verbs

Verbs which describe states or feelings do not take the continuous form:

*I ~~was liking~~ the book. X I **liked** the book. ✓*

*He ~~wasn't agreeing~~ with my opinion. X*

*He **didn't agree** with my opinion. ✓*

Some verbs can be both a state or action verb, depending on meaning:

*I **thought** the book **was interesting**. ✓ (think = be of the opinion that)*

## Past Simple and Past Continuous

- 1 Put the dialogue in the correct order (1-8). Two lines have been done for you.

- Why were you late? What happened? \_\_\_\_
- What were you doing last night? You look tired! 1
- Really? How do you know him? \_\_\_\_
- So you had dinner together? \_\_\_\_
- Yes, we did. And another old friend phoned while we were eating, so she came along, too! 8
- Well. We were looking at the menu when an old colleague, Gaspare, came in. \_\_\_\_
- I met him while I was working in Rome. \_\_\_\_
- We went out to an Italian restaurant for an early dinner but in the end, we stayed very late. \_\_\_\_

- 2 Complete the sentences using the correct form of the words in the box.

check discuss give go have join talk work

- While I \_\_\_\_\_ to a colleague, my mobile rang.
- My manager called me and \_\_\_\_\_ me some important news.
- When I \_\_\_\_\_ the company, only four other people were working there.
- I \_\_\_\_\_ for a competitor in Tokyo when I first met my boss.
- While she was giving her presentation, the lights suddenly \_\_\_\_\_ out.
- I \_\_\_\_\_ a brilliant idea while I was driving to work today.
- I got to the meeting late and when I arrived my colleagues \_\_\_\_\_ the budget.
- First, I \_\_\_\_\_ my email and then I made some calls.

- 3 Choose the correct option in *italics*.

Some days are good but today was just perfect. <sup>1</sup> *When / While* I woke up, the sun was shining. I got up and I <sup>2</sup> *had / was having* a shower when my phone rang. It was my boss. <sup>3</sup> *When / While* he was talking, I got a message from a customer. She wanted to see me as soon as possible, so while I <sup>4</sup> *listened / was listening* to my boss, I quickly got dressed and got in my car. While I <sup>5</sup> *drove / was driving* to see the customer, I heard on the radio about a competition to win a holiday. When I parked at the customer's office, I <sup>6</sup> *sent / was sending* a text to enter the competition. <sup>7</sup> *While / When* I was waiting for the customer, I got a message on my phone. My customer arrived at that moment and we started the meeting, so I didn't have time to actually read the message. The customer had good news for us - a big order. We were discussing the details when my boss <sup>8</sup> *called back / was calling back*. He <sup>9</sup> *wanted / was wanting* to offer me a promotion! When I arrived at my office, I <sup>10</sup> *saw / was seeing* the text from earlier which said I was the winner of the competition. What a day!