# PAST CONTINUOUS

**A** Study this example situation:

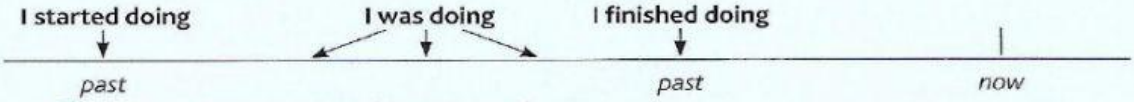



Yesterday Karen and Jim played tennis. They started at 10 o'clock and finished at 11.30.
So, at 10.30 they **were playing** tennis.

They **were playing** = they were in the middle of playing. They had not finished playing.
**Was/were -ing** is the *past continuous:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I/he/she/it | **was** | **playing** |
| we/you/they | **were** | **doing** |
| | | **working** etc. |

**B** **I was doing** something = I was in the middle of doing something at a certain time. The action or situation had already started before this time, but had not finished:




- ☐ This time last year I **was living** in Brazil.
- ☐ What **were** you **doing** at 10 o'clock last night?
- ☐ I waved to Helen, but she **wasn't looking**.

**C** Compare the *past continuous* (I **was doing**) and *past simple* (I **did**):

*Past continuous* (in the middle of an action)
- ☐ I **was walking** home when I met Dan. (in the middle of walking home)
- ☐ Kate **was watching** TV when we arrived.

*Past simple* (complete action)
- ☐ I **walked** home after the party last night. (= all the way, completely)
- ☐ Kate **watched** television a lot when she was ill last year.

**D** We often use the past simple and the past continuous together to say that something happened in the middle of something else:

- ☐ Matt **phoned** while we **were having** dinner.
- ☐ It **was raining** when I **got** up.
- ☐ I **saw** you in the park yesterday. You **were sitting** on the grass and **reading** a book.
- ☐ I **hurt** my back while I **was working** in the garden.

But we use the past simple to say that one thing happened after another:

- ☐ I **was walking** along the road when I **saw** Dan. So I **stopped**, and we **had** a chat.

Compare:

- ☐ When Karen arrived, we **were having** dinner. (= we had already started before she arrived)
- ☐ When Karen arrived, we **had** dinner. (= Karen arrived, and then we had dinner)

**E** Some verbs (for example, **know** and **want**) are not normally used in the continuous (see Unit 4A):

- ☐ We were good friends. We **knew** each other well. (*not* We were knowing)
- ☐ I was enjoying the party, but Chris **wanted** to go home. (*not* was wanting)



LIVEWORKSHEETS

# Exercises

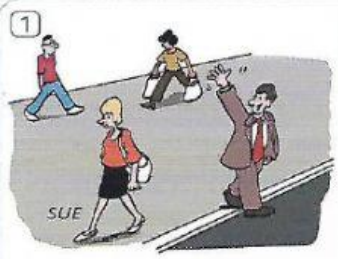
**6.1** What were you doing at these times? Write sentences as in the examples. The past continuous is not always necessary (see the second example).

1 (at 8 o'clock yesterday evening) I was having dinner.
2 (at 5 o'clock last Monday) I was on a bus on my way home.
3 (at 10.15 yesterday morning) .....
4 (at 4.30 this morning) .....
5 (at 7.45 yesterday evening) .....
6 (half an hour ago) .....

**6.2** Use your own ideas to complete the sentences. Use the past continuous.

1 Matt phoned while we were having dinner.
2 The doorbell rang while I .....
3 The car began to make a strange noise when we .....
4 Jessica fell asleep while she .....
5 The television was on, but nobody .....

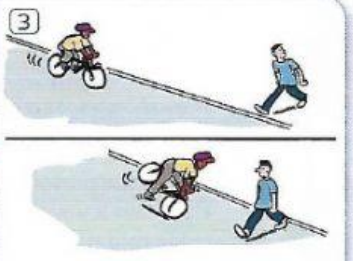
**6.3** Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.




I saw (see) Sue in town yesterday, but she ..... (not / see) me. She ..... (look) the other way.




I ..... (meet) Tom and Jane at the airport a few weeks ago. They ..... (go) to Paris and I ..... (go) to Rome. We ..... (have) a chat while we ..... (wait) for our flights.




I ..... (cycle) home yesterday when a man ..... (step) out into the road in front of me. I ..... (go) quite fast, but luckily I ..... (manage) to stop in time and ..... (not / hit) him.

**6.4** Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.

1 Jenny was waiting (wait) for me when I arrived (arrive).
2 'What ..... (you / do) at this time yesterday?' 'I was asleep.'
3 '..... (you / go) out last night?' 'No, I was too tired.'
4 How fast ..... (you / drive) when the accident ..... (happen)?
5 Sam ..... (take) a picture of me while I ..... (not / look).
6 We were in a very difficult position. We ..... (not / know) what to do.
7 I haven't seen Alan for ages. When I last ..... (see) him, he ..... (try) to find a job.
8 I ..... (walk) along the street when suddenly I ..... (hear) footsteps behind me. Somebody ..... (follow) me. I was scared and I ..... (start) to run.
9 When I was young, I ..... (want) to be a pilot.
10 Last night I ..... (drop) a plate when I ..... (do) the washing-up. Fortunately it ..... (not / break).



LIVEWORKSHEETS