

Past Continuous

1 Introduction

The Past Continuous means that at a time in the past we were in the middle of an action.



I had a wonderful dream last night. I was sitting in a park. The sun was shining, and the birds were singing. Children were playing and laughing. It was very peaceful. I didn't want to wake up.

2 Form

The Past Continuous is the past tense of be + an -ing form.

POSITIVE

I/he/she/it **was playing**
you/we/they **were playing**

NEGATIVE

I/he/she/it **wasn't playing**
you/we/they **weren't playing**

QUESTION

was I/he/she/it **playing?**
were you/we/they **playing?**

Soft music **was playing**. People **were walking** in the park.

I **wasn't dreaming**. I really **was** in New York City.

Why **did** you give our secret away? What **were** you **thinking** of?

Was Mathew already **waiting** for you when you got there?

3 Use

Read this conversation.

Melanie: I **rang** at about three yesterday afternoon, but you **weren't** in. I **didn't** know where you **were**.

David: Oh, I **was helping** Mike. We **were repairing** his car. It took ages. We **were working** on it all afternoon.

Melanie: It **was raining**. I hope you **weren't** doing it outside.

David: No, we **were** in the garage. So I **didn't** get wet. But I'm afraid I got oil all over my new trousers.

Melanie: Why **were** you **wearing** your new trousers to repair a car?

David: I **don't** know. I **forgot** I **had** them on.

It was raining at three o'clock means that at three o'clock we were in the middle of a period of rain. The rain began before three and stopped some time after three. *We were working all afternoon* means that the action went on for the whole period. David is stressing the length of time that the work went on.

We use the continuous with actions. We do not normally use it with state verbs (see Unit 7). For states we use the Past Simple.

I **didn't** know where you **were**. NOT I **wasn't knowing**...

Practice

A Form (2)

Today is the first of January, the start of a new year. Most people are feeling a bit tired. What were they doing at midnight last night?

Use these verbs: *dance, drive, listen, watch, write*

Use these phrases after the verb: *an essay, his taxi, in the street, television, to a band*



► Claire was listening to a band.

- 1 Trevor and Laura
- 2 Vicky and Rachel
- 3 Tom
- 4 Andrew

B Form (2)

Complete the conversation. Put in the Past Continuous forms.

Jessica: (►) I was looking (I / look) for you, Vicky. I'm afraid I've broken this dish.

Vicky: Oh no! What (1) (you / do)?

Jessica: (2) (I / take) it into the kitchen. I bumped into Emma. (3) (she / come) out just as (4) (I / go) in.

Vicky: I expect it was your fault. (5) (you / not / look) where (6) (you / go).

Jessica: Sorry. I'll buy you another one as soon as I have some money.

C Use (3)

What can you say in these situations? Add a sentence with the Past Continuous to say that an action lasted a long time.

► You had to work yesterday. The work went on all day.

I was working all day.

- 1 You had to make phone calls. The calls went on all evening.

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- 2 You had to wait in the rain. The wait lasted for half an hour.

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- 3 You had to make sandwiches. This went on all afternoon.

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- 4 You had to sit in a traffic jam. You were there for two hours.

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- 5 Your neighbour played loud music. This went on all night.