



PAST TENSES: Past simple or Past continuous?

Past Continuous

We use the past continuous for:

- an action which was in progress (was happening) at a stated time in the past. We do not know when the action started or finished.



At nine o'clock yesterday morning, the plane **was flying** to Tahiti from New York. (We do not know when it left or reached its destination.)

- two actions which were happening at the same time in the past.



He **was listening** carefully while they **were explaining** the plan to him.

Past Simple

We use the past simple for:

- a complete action at a stated time in the past.



The plane **landed** at the airport at eight o'clock yesterday morning. (The time is stated. The action is complete. The plane landed.)

- actions which happened immediately one after the other in the past.



First she **read** the advertisement and then she **called** the company.



Retrieved from Grammarway 2

Interrupted past or series of past actions?

We use the past continuous for an action in progress when something else happened: While he **was searching** for the source of the River Nile, he **disappeared**.
'Were you **playing** football when you **sprained** your ankle?' 'No, I **wasn't doing** anything like that. I **was running** downstairs and I **tripped** over my trousers!'

We use **when** + past simple, followed by past simple, when one action happened AFTER another one. Compare:
When Isabel joined us, we watched a DVD. (= Isabel came and then we watched a DVD.)
When Isabel joined us, we were watching a DVD. (= We were already watching a DVD at the time Isabel came.)

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1) Read the article and choose the correct words in *italics*.

Steve Fossett

Steve Fossett was always looking for adventure, even as a boy in the 1950s. After some years in business, he (0) *began* / *was beginning* his well-known adventures, from swimming the English Channel to sailing round the world. But Fossett is best-known for his adventures in the air – in hot-air balloons, gliders and light aircraft.

In 2005 he (1) *broke* / *was breaking* the record for non-stop flying when he flew round the world in 67 hours without stopping for fuel. A year later, as he (2) *attempted* / *was attempting* to break the record for the longest flight, he had to stop because part of his engine had failed – but he broke the record, anyway.

Fossett's adventures often put him in danger – in 1998, while he (3) *travelled* / *was travelling* around the world in a balloon, he almost died (4) *while* / *when* the balloon fell from the sky. In the end, it was a routine flight that (5) *took* / *was taking* his life – he was flying a small plane across the Nevada Desert in September 2007 when he (6) *disappeared* / *was disappearing*. No one could find him, then, some months later, a hiker (7) *walked* / *was walking* through the mountains in southern California when he (8) *noticed* / *was noticing* some personal items which (9) *belonged* / *were belonging* to the adventurer, and soon afterwards a search party (10) *found* / *was finding* the wreckage of the plane. Some time later, Fossett's body was found – his adventures were over.



MODERN ADVENTURER

2) Complete the sentences with **past simple** or **past continuous**. Use the verbs in brackets.

1. When the war _____ out we _____ in Warsaw. (break / live)
2. It _____ to rain when we _____. (begin / start)

3. While I _____ to the concert somebody _____ at the door. (listen / knock)
4. While the scientist _____ in his laboratory a friend _____ to see him. (work / come)
5. She _____ very quickly when the accident _____. (drive / happen)
6. She _____ a pink summer frock when I _____ her yesterday. (wear / meet)
7. The telephone _____ while I _____ my bath. (ring / have)
8. At half past nine she still _____ her homework. (do)
9. The farmer _____ wheat when he _____ many airplanes in the sky. (sow / see)

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