

Tell us a story



Past continuous



Some of the most famous people in the world started their working lives in the most humdrum jobs. In his early twenties, Brad Pitt dropped out of a degree in advertising and journalism, and drove to Hollywood to pursue his childhood dream of becoming an actor. As for many aspiring actors, the early days were tough and Pitt did various part-time jobs while he was taking acting lessons. He worked as a limo chauffeur, a fridge removal man, and he even dressed up in a chicken costume to attract customers when he was working for the Mexican fast food chain El Pollo Loco.

Actor Johnny Depp dropped out of school at 15. As a teenager he played guitar with a rock band called *The Kids*. After that, he worked as a phone salesman, a position he once called his 'first acting job' because he used different voices when he was bored. 'You're calling people who don't want you to call them,' he recalls. 'You put on your best fake voice and try and sell them ballpoint pens with their name printed on them.' Depp was still selling pens when his friend Nicolas Cage suggested that he try acting. At 22, he got his first role in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

Reading: First jobs

- 1 Which jobs do you think these people did before they were rich and famous?

Brad Pitt Johnny Depp Michael Dell

removal man dish washer driver telemarketer
musician promotions representative

- 2 Read the texts quickly and check your predictions.

- 3 Read the texts again and find this information.

- 1 Who went to university? _____ and _____
2 Who got some good advice about work? _____
3 Who trained to be an actor? _____
4 Who worked in telesales? _____ and _____

At the age of 12, the founder of Dell computers, Michael Dell was washing dishes in a Chinese restaurant for \$2.30 an hour. Dell had several more jobs like that and by the age of 16 he was selling newspaper subscriptions. He recalls, 'I'd call people on the phone and try to convince them to buy the newspaper. I discovered that people who were moving into new houses or apartments were buying more newspapers than other people, so I tried to find those people and that worked very well.' By the time Dell enrolled at the University of Texas, he was already a successful businessman.



4 Find the words and expressions in the texts which have a similar meaning to these expressions.

- 1 boring and having no variety (text 1)
- 2 left a course before it finished (texts 1 and 2)
- 3 try to achieve something he's always wanted (text 1)
- 4 it was difficult at first (text 1)
- 5 not real (text 2)
- 6 remembers an event from the past (texts 2 and 3)

Grammar: Past continuous

5 Find seven examples of the past continuous in the texts.

6 Match the uses of the past continuous in the table to the examples in exercise 5.

Past continuous

- 1 We use the past continuous to describe past actions or situations which were in progress at a particular time in the past.
- 2 We often use the past continuous together with the past simple. The past continuous gives the background details or describes longer events.
- 3 We can also use the past continuous to show two or more actions were in progress at the same time.

While he was studying at university, **he was also running** a successful business.

When, while and as often introduce the action or situation in progress which is interrupted by another action or event. The shorter action can be introduced by *when* but not *while*.

>> For more information on the past continuous, see page 165.

7 Complete these celebrity anecdotes with the past simple or past continuous form of the verbs. The first one has been done for you.

- 1 At the age of 19 Jennifer Lopez was working (work) in a legal office in New York during the day and _____ (dance) in nightclubs in Manhattan in the evenings. She was also _____ (take) dancing lessons in her free time.
- 2 Cameron Diaz _____ (work) as a model when she _____ (get) a part in *The Mask*, a film that _____ (transform) the 21-year-old into an instant star.
- 3 In 1990 J K Rowling _____ (sit) on a train in London when the idea for Harry Potter _____ (occur) to her. She recalls, 'Really, the best thing about working in an office was that I _____ (can) type up my stories on my computer when no one _____ (look).'



TALKING POINT

- How old were you when you got your first job? What was the best/worst thing about it?
- What was the most unusual job you ever did?

Speaking: Recalling the past

8 Work in pairs or groups. Ask and answer the questions.

- 1 What were you doing at this time:
 - a yesterday?
 - b last week?
- 2 What were you doing when you were:
 - a 12 years old?
 - b 15 years old?
- 3 Were you working when you were:
 - a 18? (How much were you earning?)
 - b 22?

9 What were your parents doing when they were these ages? And what about your grandparents? Did any of them have unusual jobs?

Reading: Humour in hard times

- 1 Look at the photos. What kind of business does Anya Hindmarch have? Do you think this type of company does well or badly in times of an economic recession?
- 2 Read the article about handbag designer, Anya Hindmarch and put these events in chronological order.
 - a When the writer visited Anya's office, the male employees were growing beards.
 - b During the recession Anya gave a humorous presentation to motivate her staff.
 - c The web team had the idea of a beard-growing competition while they were having dinner with Anya.
 - d By the age of 19, Anya Hindmarch had set up her own business, although she hadn't been to business school.
 - e One evening she invited members of staff to her home for dinner.
 - f Her handbag stores became successful.



A Fun-and-Games Strategy Part One

When I walked into the handbag designer Anya Hindmarch's head office in London last month, I was surprised to see all of the men were growing long beards. 'It was a beard-growing contest, with prizes for growth and creativity,' says Ms Hindmarch. 'It was the web team's idea,' she explains. 'We had them for supper at home and my husband James hadn't shaved* that morning. We were joking around* when we came up with the plan.'

Last year sales at the handbag store were up four per cent at a time when most luxury businesses were experiencing hard times. Perhaps Ms Hindmarch's shop was successful because she had set up her company by the age of 19, or perhaps because she hadn't gone to business school, or perhaps because she had made her name with stylish evening bags and fun bags with personalized images.

Ms Hindmarch says her strategy is about humour and cost-cutting. She first began her fun-and-games strategy a year ago when she made an internal presentation to staff. Instead of talking through the sales figures from her 33 stores around the world, she used slides* of war-time propaganda posters of the 'Keep Calm and Carry On*' kind. 'It made them laugh,' she says. She explains the idea was about working hard and building a sense of community in hard times.

shave: cut hair very close to the skin, especially from the face

joke around: say things that are funny

slide: a single page of a presentation created with software like PowerPoint

carry on: continue doing something

3 Discuss these questions in pairs.

- 1 What do you remember about Anya's fun-and-games strategy?
- 2 Would you like to work for someone like Anya? Why?/Why not?

Grammar: Past tenses

4 Read and complete the table with these tenses: past simple, past perfect or past continuous. Then find two other examples of the past perfect in part one of the article.

Past tenses

We form the past perfect using _____ + _____ of the main verb.

1 We use the _____ to talk about things that happened in the past.

*She first **began** her fun-and-games strategy a year ago when she **made** an internal presentation.*

2 We use the _____ to talk about things that were in progress at a particular time in the past.

*We **were joking around** when we came up with the plan.*

3 When we want to show that one action or event happened before another in the past, we use the _____ to talk about the earlier one.

*They came for dinner and my husband **hadn't shaved** that morning.*

4 We can use the _____ to talk about life experience before a point of time in the past.

*She **had set up** her company by the age of 19.*

See pages 164 and 165 for more information on past tenses.

5 Look at these things that are mentioned in part two of the article. What do you think happened next?

ice cream manicure little girl
makeover £50 note

7 Complete part two of the article by putting the verbs in the past simple, past continuous or past perfect. Sometimes more than one option is possible.

A Fun-and-Games Strategy Part Two

After her presentation, Ms Hindmarch handed out £50 notes that she ¹ _____ (photocopy) to every employee saying: 'If you can think of a way to save £500, I'll give you a real note.' The aim ² _____ (be) to think about saving, so that people were rethinking business travel and ³ _____ (not/order) expensive office equipment. By the end of the year, the company ⁴ _____ (save) £25,000.

To motivate her employees, she ⁵ _____ (offer) them a weekly manicure* so that they ⁶ _____ (not/have to) leave the office to get one. This way they ⁷ _____ (spend) more time at work. The handbag designer then ⁸ _____ (extend) her ideas to her customers and started joint ventures with other brands: an ice cream brand* ⁹ _____ (serve) icecream in-store for a week; and a cosmetic brand ¹⁰ _____ (give) customers makeovers*.

As a result, more people came into the stores. 'Our customers felt we ¹¹ _____ (treat*) them like friends,' she says. 'One mother came in to buy her daughter an icecream and the daughter announced the next time she ¹² _____ (want) both an icecream and a handbag.'

manicure: a treatment for hands and nails

brand: a name given to a product so that it can be easily recognized
give someone a makeover: make someone more attractive by giving them new clothes, a new hair style, etc.

treat: behave towards someone in a particular way