

8 Past continuous

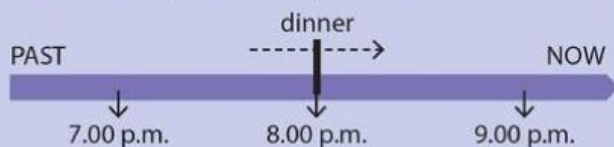
I can use the past continuous tense to describe past events and actions.

Past continuous



We use the past continuous to talk about an event that was in progress at a particular time in the past. We often use it with a time expression (e.g. at six o'clock, yesterday morning, last night).

We **were having** dinner at eight o'clock.



We can use the past continuous to say what different people were doing at the same time.

In 2009 Max **was studying** in Edinburgh, his sister **was working** in Manchester and his parents **were living** in London.

We often use the past continuous to describe the situation at the start of a story.

It was Friday night and it **was raining** hard. Most people **were walking** fast to escape the rain, but Carla **was standing** at the bus stop. She **wasn't wearing** a coat and she **was getting** very wet. Suddenly, a car drove past very quickly and splashed her with water.

1 Circle the correct option.

► Was / Were you watching TV at seven o'clock?

1 They **weren't talk** / **weren't talking** about you.

2 I **was** / **were** listening to some great music this morning.

3 'I wasn't making a lot of noise.'
'Yes, you **was** / **were**.'

4 Where **was she** / **she was** going yesterday evening?

5 It was very sunny but they **didn't** / **weren't** wearing sunglasses.

6 It **was** / **were** snowing and children **was** / **were** playing in the street.

7 This time last year we were **siting** / **sitting** on the beach in Australia.

8 My brothers **are** / **were** arguing all day yesterday.

9 Who **was** / **were** your mum talking to on the phone?

10 John **wasn't working** / **not working** very hard.

2 8.1 Listen. What were they doing when the earthquake happened? Complete the table with the phrases below. Then complete the sentences.

do homework dream about the sea
have breakfast listen to radio play basketball
sit at desk sleep talk walk to school win

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Daisy | have breakfast, _____ |
| Fred | _____, _____ |
| Kim and May | _____, _____ |
| Helen | _____, _____ |
| Ben and Alex | _____, _____ |

1 Daisy **was having breakfast** and she _____.

2 Fred _____ and he _____.

3 Kim and May _____ and they _____.

4 Helen _____ and she _____.

5 Ben and Alex _____ and they _____.

- 3 Look at the pictures and write questions and sentences using the past continuous.



a



c



b



d

- Jim/watch TV/six o'clock.
Jim wasn't watching TV at six o'clock.
- 1 Jim and Michael/have breakfast/six o'clock

 - 2 Jim/swim/seven o'clock

 - 3 Michael/listen to music/seven o'clock

 - 4 Jim and Michael/have breakfast/seven o'clock

 - 5 Michael/do homework/four o'clock

 - 6 Jim and Michael/swim/four o'clock

 - 7 Jim and Michael/do homework/nine o'clock?
_____, they _____.

 - 8 Michael /play video games/nine o'clock

 - 9 Jim/lie on the sofa/nine o'clock

 - 10 Michael/watch TV/nine o'clock
_____, he _____.

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- 4 **GAME** Work in pairs to guess your partner's actions. Student A: go to page 168. Student B: go to page 170.

I think you were cleaning your room.

I wasn't cleaning my room. I was eating an ice cream.

- 5 Work in pairs. Look at the example. Ask questions to complete the table.

What were you doing at 7 o'clock today?

I was cleaning my teeth.

| Time | Activity |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 7 a.m. today | Ana was cleaning her teeth. |
| 9 p.m. yesterday | |
| 4 p.m. yesterday | |
| 11 a.m. yesterday | |
| 2 p.m. last Saturday | |
| 11 p.m. last Saturday | |

Past continuous or past simple?

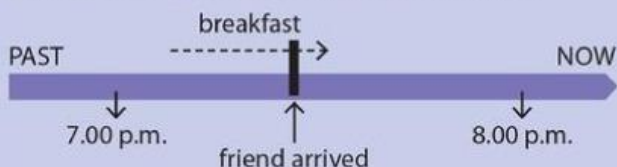
We use the **past simple** to talk about an event that finished at a point in the past. We often use it to talk about a sequence of events.

*She **got up**, **had** breakfast and **went** to work.
In the morning, Robert **went** shopping in town. Then he **met** his friends at the park and they **played** football.
After that, he **went** home and **did** his homework.*

We use the **past continuous** to talk about an event that was in progress at a time in the past, or when another event happened.

*'I called you at 7 o'clock. Where were you?' 'I **was playing** basketball.'*

*She **was having** breakfast when her friend arrived.*



We can use the past simple and past continuous in the same sentence. We often use **when** and **while** in these sentences.

*He **was walking** to school **when** it **started** to rain.
While he **was walking** to school, it **started** to rain.*

We can use **when** or **while** with the past continuous. We cannot use **while** with the past simple.

*I saw Ben **when/while** I **was waiting** for the bus.
I **was waiting** for the bus **when** I saw Ben.*

There are some verbs that we don't normally use in the continuous form: e.g., **hear, know, like, love, understand, see, want**. See also Unit 6 page 31.

*~~I **wasn't understanding** the homework.~~
I **didn't understand** the homework.*

6 8.2 Circle the correct option. Then listen and check your answers.

► What **did you do** / **were you doing** at half past seven?

- 1 It **rained** / **was raining** when I left home.
- 2 Jill got up and **had** / **was having** breakfast.
- 3 My racket **broke** / **was breaking** when I was playing tennis.
- 4 Where **were you going** / **did you go** when I saw your car yesterday?
- 5 They **wanted** / **were wanting** to go out last night.
- 6 They **did** / **were doing** their homework and then they went shopping.
- 7 **Did she like** / **Was she liking** your new shoes?
- 8 'Where were you yesterday afternoon?'
'I **visited** / **was visiting** my grandparents.'
- 9 The film **finished** / **was finishing** at four o'clock.
- 10 Mary **didn't know** / **wasn't knowing** the answer when the teacher asked her the question.

7 Complete the sentences using the correct forms of the verbs in brackets.

- His phone rang while he was doing the exam. (ring/do)
- 1 May _____ sweets when her tooth _____. (eat/break)
 - 2 While I _____ the door, I _____ white paint on my trousers. (paint/get)
 - 3 What _____ they _____ about when we _____ into the room? (talk/come)
 - 4 While we _____ at the bus stop, we _____ an accident. (wait/see)
 - 5 What _____ you _____ while you _____ with your mum? (buy/shop)
 - 6 She _____ to the shops when someone _____ her handbag. (walk/steal)
 - 7 While I _____ on the beach, my brother _____ for a swim. (lie/go)
 - 8 Sam _____ on the bus when a bird _____ in through the window. (sit/fly)
 - 9 _____ you _____ your phone while you _____ for the bus? (drop/run)
 - 10 I _____ to music when my dad _____ me to switch it off. (listen/tell)

8 8.3 Listen to Mary talking about her cousins' visit. Complete sentences 1–3 and then 4–7.

When her cousins arrived, ...

► Mary was doing her homework.

- 1 her dad _____.
- 2 her mum _____.
- 3 her brother _____.

The house was a mess, so ...

- 4 her aunt _____,
- 5 her uncle _____,
- 6 Mary _____ and _____ while
- 7 her cousins _____.

9

GAME

Play in pairs. Student A: say a past continuous sentence. Student B: add a 'when' clause. Use the verbs below.

clean make play read walk watch
arrive break hear fall over find phone

I was cleaning the cupboard when ...

... the door broke.

She was reading a newspaper when ...

... her teacher arrived.

10

Complete the text with the past simple or past continuous form of the verbs in brackets.



We were sitting (sit) in the back of a big jeep. No one ¹ _____ (talk). All of us ² _____ (look) intently through the windows of the car. Outside the African sun ³ _____ (shine), hot and bright, but nothing ⁴ _____ (move). Then suddenly, we ⁵ _____ (see) it – an elephant. It ⁶ _____ (appear) from a small group of trees and ⁷ _____ (start) to walk slowly towards the jeep. While it ⁸ _____ (come) towards us, I ⁹ _____ (get) my camera and ¹⁰ _____ (take) some photos. The elephant ¹¹ _____ (continue) in our direction. It was huge, much bigger than you ¹² _____ (can) imagine. Someone asked the guide, 'Is this dangerous? Will the elephant stop?' The guide ¹³ _____ (not say) anything. He switched off the car engine and ¹⁴ _____ (give) a signal to be silent. Now some of us were getting nervous. My hands ¹⁵ _____ (shake) and my heart ¹⁶ _____ (beat) very fast. The elephant ¹⁷ _____ (stop). It looked at the jeep for a long time. Then it simply ¹⁸ _____ (turn) around and ¹⁹ _____ (walk) back into the trees. Everyone breathed again. It was amazing!

11

Look at the information about Alex and his brother Richard. Write sentences using the past simple and past continuous.

Alex

August 1999 becomes a footballer
1999–2002 plays professional football
June 2002 breaks his leg and gives up football
January 2005 starts to learn Chinese
2006–2009 studies Chinese at university
August 2008 goes to the Beijing Olympics
2009–2011 works as a football coach in China

Richard

1998–2000 studies at school
October 2000 visits South America
2001–2004 studies Spanish at university
2005–2007 works for a company in England
May 2006 finds a job in Mexico
2006–2011 lives in Mexico
July 2010 gets married

▶ August 1999: Alex became a footballer while Richard was studying at school.

1 October 2000:

2 June 2002:

3 January 2005:

4 May 2006:

5 August 2008:

6 July 2010:

Self-evaluation Rate your progress.

| | 😊 | 😊😊 | 😊😊😊 |
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