

## 48 Past simple or past continuous?



At the end of the film the bridge collapsed while the truck was crossing it.

### 1 Use

| PAST SIMPLE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | PAST CONTINUOUS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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| to describe one or more finished actions in the past:<br><i>We arrived at the hotel at three o'clock and went to our room.</i><br><br><i>I called you about four times yesterday afternoon.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | to describe an unfinished action at and around a time in the past:<br><i>When we arrived at the hotel, the maid was cleaning our room.</i> (The cleaning was not finished when we arrived.)<br><br><i>I couldn't answer the phone because I was speaking to some clients.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| when one action happened after another:<br><i>When Isabel came, we watched a DVD.</i><br>(= Isabel came and then we watched a DVD.)<br><br><div style="text-align: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> <span>6.00</span> <span>8.00</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div> <div style="margin: 0 10px;">↓</div> <div style="text-align: center;">Isabel came</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div> <div style="margin: 0 10px;">→</div> <div style="text-align: center;">we watched a DVD</div> </div> </div> | to describe something you were doing at the time when another thing happened:<br><i>When Isabel came, we were watching a DVD.</i><br>(= We were watching a DVD at the time Isabel came.)<br><br><div style="text-align: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> <span>6.00</span> <span>8.00</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div> <div style="margin: 0 10px;">↓</div> <div style="text-align: center;">Isabel came</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div> <div style="margin: 0 10px;">→</div> <div style="text-align: center;">we were watching a DVD</div> </div> </div> |

### 2 when and while

We can use either *when* or *while* before the past continuous:

*The bridge collapsed **when/while** the truck **was crossing** it.*

*The post came **when/while** I **was having** my breakfast.*



We don't use *while* before the past simple, but we can use *when*:

✗ *While the post came I was having my breakfast.*

✓ *When the post came, I was having my breakfast.*

## Practice

### 1 Choose the correct words in *italics*.

- 0 After I brushed my teeth I *went* / *was going* to bed.
- 1 I *went* / *was going* to the dentist five times last year.
- 2 My computer *broke down* / *was breaking down* yesterday.
- 3 Hilary fell on the ice last winter and *broke* / *was breaking* her arm.
- 4 We were relaxing in the garden *when* / *while* we suddenly heard a loud noise.
- 5 Karl didn't hear the doorbell because he *listened* / *was listening* to his iPod.
- 6 After I left university, I worked in a bank and then I *moved* / *was moving* to an insurance company.
- 7 My cousin couldn't visit us in August because she *did* / *was doing* a summer course.
- 8 I was having a shower *when* / *while* the phone rang.

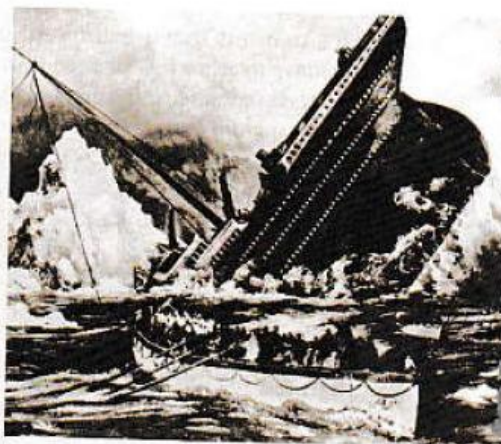
### 2 Match the sentences 1 and 2 with A and B.

- |                                                                |                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0 1 When my father arrived, we looked at his photos.           | → A We started looking at the photos before my father arrived. |
| 2 When my father arrived, we were looking at his photos.       | → B My father brought the photos with him.                     |
| 1 1 My aunt worked for Mr O'Reilly.                            | A She was his assistant.                                       |
| 2 My aunt was working for Mr O'Reilly when she heard the news. | B She was speaking to a client on the phone.                   |
| 2 1 I was having a party when she told me the news.            | A I had a party after she told me the news.                    |
| 2 When she told me the news I had a party.                     | B The party started before she told me the news.               |
| 3 1 Paul travelled a lot in his last job.                      | A He was on a plane to Rio.                                    |
| 2 Paul was travelling when the accident happened.              | B He was an international salesman.                            |

### 3 GRAMMAR IN USE Complete the text. Use the correct form of the verbs in brackets ().

## The sinking of the TITANIC

ON THE NIGHT of 14 April 1912 the cruise ship *Titanic* (0) ..... *was* ..... (be) in the middle of its first journey between England and New York. It (1) ..... (travel) across the north Atlantic, south of Greenland. As usual, a sailor (2) ..... (watch) the sea in front of the ship; he (3) ..... (look) for icebergs. But it was dark and there was no moon, so he couldn't see anything. Suddenly, at exactly 11.40, the ship (4) ..... (hit) a huge iceberg. The ship quickly began to sink. At the time of the accident many of the passengers (5) ..... (sleep). The sailors



(6) ..... (tell) everybody to leave the ship, but there (7) ..... (not be) enough boats for all the people. In the end more than 1,500 people (8) ..... (die).