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Past Continuous

Grammar – past continuous [was / were + ing]

Affirmative: I was doing / You were doing / He/she/it was doing / We were doing / You were doing *(plural)* / They were doing

Negative: I was not doing / You were not doing / He/she/it was not doing / We were not doing / You were not doing / They were not doing

Question: Was I doing? / Were you doing? / Was he/she/it doing? Were we doing? / Were you doing? / Were they doing?

We can use it to talk about a specific point in time. We use the past continuous to talk about past events which went on for a period of time.

We use it when we want to emphasize the continuing process of an activity or the period of that activity. (If we just want to talk about the past event as a simple fact, we use the past simple.)

- While I was driving home, Peter was trying desperately to contact me.
- Were you expecting any visitors?
- Sorry, were you sleeping?
- I was just making some coffee.
- I was thinking about him last night.
- In the 1990s few people were using mobile phones.

We often use it to describe a "background action" when something else happened.

- I was walking in the street when I suddenly fell over.
- She was talking to me on the phone and it suddenly went dead.
- They were still waiting for the plane when I spoke to them.
- The company was declining rapidly before he took charge.
- We were just talking about it before you arrived.
- I was making a presentation in front of 500 people when the microphone stopped working.

Past Simple

Grammar – past simple [+ed / irregular verb form]

Affirmative: I played / You played / He/she/it played / We played / You played *(plural)* / They played

Negative: I did not play / You did not play / He/she/it did not play / We did not play / You did not play / They did not play

Question: Did I play? / Did you play? / Did he/she/it play? / Did we play? / Did you play? / Did they play?

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Functions and examples

We use the past simple to talk about actions and states which we see as completed in the past.

We can use it to talk about a specific point in time.

- She came back last Friday.
- I saw her in the street.
- They didn't agree to the deal.

It can also be used to talk about a period of time.

- She lived in Tokyo for seven years.
- They were in London from Monday to Thursday of last week.
- When I was living in London, I went to all the jazz concerts I could.

You will often find the past simple used with time expressions such as these:

- Yesterday
- three weeks ago
- last year
- in 2002
- from March to June
- for a long time
- for 6 weeks
- in the 1980s
- in the last century
- in the past

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Past Continuous Exercise 1

(elementary level)

Fill in the correct form of the **past continuous**

1. I looked outside but it _____ (**STILL RAIN**).
2. This time last year we _____ in Spain (**TRAVEL**).
3. While we _____ in the garden it started to rain (**PLAY**).
4. You missed the ball because you _____it (**NOT WATCH**)
5. While the students _____ in the pool their parents _____ them (**SWIM, WATCH**).
6. My parents _____ in Jamaica during the summer of 2016 (**LIVE**).
7. Serena _____ a tray when she slipped (**CARRY**).
8. I couldn't come last night because I _____ (**WORK**).
9. She _____ a shower when Cathy called. (**HAVE**)
10. What _____ for in the dustbin (**YOU LOOK**)?
11. It was a lovely day. The sun _____ and the birds _____ (**SHINE, SING**).
12. Sorry. Could you say that again. - I _____ (**NOT LISTEN**).
13. He _____ about the bad treatment he received (**COMPLAIN**).
14. Between 2 and 4 yesterday afternoon they boys _____ basketball (**PLAY**)

Past simple and Past Continuous Exercise 2

Fill in the correct form of the **past tense**: Simple or continuous

1. My brother _____ (**drink**) while he _____ (**do**) his homework.
2. He _____ (**walk**) into the classroom, then he_____ **(sat)** down.
3. Harry_____ (**sing**) a song when Jane _____ (**come**) in.
4. Nothing _____ (**happen**) when I turned on the radio.
5. It _____ (**start**) to rain while I _____ (**walk**) through the park.
6. Jackie _____ (**listen**) to the radio when the doorbell _____ (**ring**).
7. He _____ (**find**) some money when he _____ (**clean**) the cupboards.
8. He _____ (**see**) the accident when he _____ (**drive**) home from work.
9. While Jimmy _____ (**tell**) a joke his teacher _____ (**WALK**) in.
10. The Smiths _____ (**fly**) to Italy yesterday.

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Past simple and Past Continuous Exercise 2

(Advanced level)

Fill in the correct form of the **past tense**: Simple or continuous

1. The lights _____ out as we _____ the plans for the wedding. (**go, discuss**)
2. I _____ on a road in the mountains when I _____ out of petrol. (**drive, run**)
3. "What _____ between 5 and 7 yesterday afternoon? (**you do**) - I _____ in the *red lion pub* with a lot of other people. (**sit**)
4. The singer _____ his best hits while the fans _____ over the fence. (**sing, climb**)
5. While the woman _____ into the bus, the driver suddenly_____ . (**get, move**)
6. When _____ that the train _____ in the opposite direction? (**you realise, go**)
7. That's terrible! A four-year old boy _____ from a bridge while he _____ after his dog. (**fall, run**)
8. This morning while I _____ past the supermarket I _____something strange hanging from the roof. (**walk, notice**)
9. We _____out because it_____. (**not go, rain**)
10. When Betty, Ann and Jane_____, we _____ a cup of tea (**arrive, just have**)
11. The weather was bad as I _____ in a queue for the cinema - it _____ heavily and a cold wind _____. (**stand, rain, blow**)
12. They _____ in the fields when they _____ a UFO flying over their heads (**play, see**)
13. The earthquake _____ the region at three in the morning. Many inhabitants _____ in their houses. (**hit, sleep**)
14. When they _____ the car two years ago a doctor _____ it (**buy, own**)
15. Linda and John _____ the car when it _____ to rain. They _____ everything away and _____ into the house where their mother _____ cookies. (**wash, start, put, run, just make**)
16. I haven't seen Andy for ages. when I last _____ him he _____ for a job somewhere in London. (**meet, look**)
17. Yesterday when I _____ home from school, a man _____ out on the road. luckily i _____ very fast, so i managed to stop in time and _____ him. (**cycle, step, not go, not hit**)
18. _____ Carol at the party last night? – yes, she _____ that wonderful dress she _____ in Paris. (**you meet, wear, buy**)
19. The car _____ strange noises all the way home. (**make**)
20. Simon _____ an ice cream and then he _____ home (**buy, go**)

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Answer Key Exercise 1

1. I looked outside but it was still raining (**STILL RAIN**).
2. This time last year we were travelling in Spain (**TRAVEL**).
3. While we were playing in the garden it started to rain (**PLAY**).
4. You missed the ball because you were not watching it (**NOT WATCH**)
5. While the students were swimming in the pool their parents were watching them (**SWIM, WATCH**).
6. My parents were living in Jamaica during the summer of 2016 (**LIVE**).
7. Serena was carrying a tray when she slipped (**CARRY**).
8. I couldn't come last night because I was working (**WORK**).
9. She was having a shower when Cathy called. (**HAVE**)
10. What are you looking for in the dustbin (**YOU LOOK**)?
11. It was a lovely day. The sun was shining, and the birds were singing (**SHINE, SING**).
12. Sorry. Could you say that again. - I wasn't listening (**NOT LISTEN**).
13. He was complaining about the bad treatment he received (**COMPLAIN**).
14. Between 2 and 4 yesterday afternoon they boys were playing basketball (**PLAY**)

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Answer key Exercise 1

1. The lights went out as we were discussing the plans for the wedding. (**go, discuss**)
2. I was driving on a road in the mountains when I ran out of petrol. (**drive, run**)
3. "What were you doing between 5 and 7 yesterday afternoon? (**you do**) - I was sitting in the *red lion pub* with a lot of other people. (**sit**)
4. The singer was singing his best hits while the fans were climbing over the fence. (**sing, climb**)
5. While the woman was getting into the bus, the driver suddenly moved. (**get, move**)
6. When did you realise that the train was going in the opposite direction? (**you realise, go**)
7. That's terrible! A four-year old boy fell from a bridge while he was running after his dog. (**fall, run**)
8. This morning while I was walking past the supermarket I noticed something strange hanging from the roof. (**walk, notice**)
9. We didn't go out because it was raining. (**not go, rain**)
10. When Betty, Ann and Jane arrived, we were just having a cup of tea (**arrive, just have**)
11. The weather was bad as I was standing in a queue for the cinema - it was raining heavily and a cold wind (was) blowing. (**stand, rain, blow**)
12. They were playing in the fields when they saw a UFO flying over their heads (**play, see**)
13. The earthquake hit the region at three in the morning. Many inhabitants were sleeping in their houses. (**hit, sleep**)
14. When they bought the car two years ago a doctor owned it (**buy, own**)
15. Linda and John were washing the car when it started to rain. They were putting everything away and ran into the house where their mother was just making (had just made) cookies. (**wash, start, put, run, just make**)
16. I haven't seen Andy for ages. when I last saw him he was looking for a job somewhere in London. (**meet, look**)
17. Yesterday when I was cycling home from school, a man stepped out on the road. luckily i wasn't going very fast, so i managed to stop in time and not hit him. (**cycle, step, not go, not hit**)
18. Did you meet Carol at the party last night? – yes, she was wearing that wonderful dress she bought in Paris. (**you meet, wear, buy**)
19. The car was making strange noises all the way home. (**make**)
20. Simon bought an ice cream and then he went home (**buy, go**)

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