

9 Past Simple – Past Continuous



First Naomi **planted** the flowers and then she **watered** them.



George **played** football with his dad yesterday.

Past Simple Form: regular verb + -ed

Affirmative	Negative
I/You/He/She/It/We/They looked/ate	I/You/He/She/It/We/They did not/didn't look/did not/didn't eat
Interrogative	Short Answers
Did I/you/he/she/it/we/they look/eat?	Yes, I/you/he/she/it/we/they did . No, I/you/he/she/it/we/they didn't .

Use

We use the **past simple** for:

- an action that happened at a **definite time** (stated or implied) in the **past**.
*They **left** for Paris a week ago.*
- actions that happened immediately one after the other.
*She **cleared** the table, **did** the washing-up and **went** straight to bed.*
- habits** or states which are finished.
*Patrick **rode** his bike every day when he was a child.*
- past actions which **won't take place again**.
*Da Vinci **painted** the Mona Lisa. (He's now dead. He won't be painting any more.)*

The time expressions we use with the past simple are: *yesterday, then, when, How long ago ...?, last night/week/month/year/Friday/May, etc., two days/months, etc. ago, in 2010, etc.*

Notes:

- When there are two past continuous forms in a sentence with the same subject, we can avoid repetition by just using the present participle (-ing form) of the second verb and leaving out the second subject as well as the verb **was/were**.
*Tom **was having** breakfast and **reading** the morning paper. (= Tom **was having** breakfast and **he was reading** the morning paper).*
- The **past continuous** is not used for repeated actions in the past. The past simple is used instead.
*When Mark was younger, he **went** jogging every day. (NOT: ... he **was going** jogging every day.)*



He **was walking** down the street when he **slipped** on a banana skin.



The teacher **was helping** Sue while she **was doing** the exercise.

Past Continuous Form: was/were + main verb + -ing

Affirmative	Negative
I/He/She/It was running	I/He/She/It was not/wasn't running
We/You/They were running	We/You/They were not/weren't running
Interrogative	Short Answers
Was I/he/she/it running?	[Yes, I/he/she/it was . No, I/he/she/it wasn't .
Were we/you/they running?	[Yes, we/you/they were . No, we/you/they weren't .

Use

We use the **past continuous** for:

- an action that was **in progress** at a **stated time** in the past. We don't mention when the action started or finished.
*Joe **was watching** a cartoon show on Sunday at noon.*
- two or more **simultaneous** actions in the past.
*Sue **was listening** to music while she **was tidying** her room.*
- an action which was **in progress** when another action **interrupted** it. We use the past continuous for the action in progress (the longer action), and the past simple for the action which interrupted it (the shorter action).
*Alex **was sleeping** when a loud noise **woke** him.*
- to describe the **atmosphere, setting, etc.** and to give **background information** to a story.
*It **was** an ordinary morning. We **were getting** ready for school while Mum **was making** breakfast.*

The time expressions we use with the past continuous are: *while, when, as, all day/night/morning, all day yesterday, etc.*

1 Match the sentences (1-8) with the correct description (a-h), as in the example.

- 1 c Lilly **was cooking** while her brother **was studying**.
- 2 Susan **rode** her bike to school when she was little.
- 3 First Mum **had** a shower and then she **prepared** dinner.
- 4 It was a strange night. The dogs **were howling** and the cats **were miaowing** for hours.
- 5 I **was playing** tennis at 6:00 pm yesterday.
- 6 C. S. Lewis **wrote** *The Chronicles of Narnia*.
- 7 James **washed** his car yesterday.
- 8 Linda **was sleeping** when the fire **broke out**.

- a an action which was in progress at a stated time in the past
- b background information to a story
- c two or more simultaneous actions in the past
- d a past action which won't take place again
- e actions that happened immediately one after the other
- f an action that happened at a definite time in the past
- g an action which was in progress when another action interrupted it
- h a past state or habit which is finished

2 Fill in the gaps using the verb in brackets in the past simple or the past continuous.

- 1 A: You *didn't call* (not/call) last night!
B: No, I (help) my sister with her wedding plans and I (get) home after midnight.
- 2 A: When I (drive) home the other night, I (see) a terrible accident.
B: Oh my! (you/call) the police?
- 3 A: Who (mow) their lawn this morning between 7 and 8 o'clock?
B: Our neighbour, Larry. He (wake) me up, too!
- 4 A: Great cake! (you/make) it?
B: No, I (get) this one at the shop. While I (bake) the cake in the oven, I (talk) to a friend on the phone and I (not/take) it out in time. So, it (burn).
- 5 A: Guess who I (bump into) this morning! Jessica. She (ride) her bike to work, while I (sit) in my car, stuck in traffic.
B: Lovely! (you/arrange) for us to get together?
- 6 A: What (you/do) when the fire started?
B: I (study) in my room.

3 Underline the correct item.

- 1 He got up/was getting up and was leaving/left the room without saying a word.
- 2 It was a cold Monday morning. It snowed/was snowing and a cold wind was blowing/blew.
- 3 Ben didn't go/wasn't going to school yesterday, so he missed/was missing the trip to the museum.
- 4 The students wrote/were writing a test when the fire alarm was going/went off.
- 5 Jane was listening/listened to music while she was jogging/jogged in the park.
- 6 Leonardo da Vinci was painting/painted famous works of art.

4 Put the verbs in brackets into the past simple or the past continuous.

Last Sunday evening, my brother and I 1) were (be) home alone, as our parents 2) (visit) an aunt who was sick at the time. It 3) (rain) very heavily outside, and we 4) (enjoy) a quiet night at home. Suddenly, the lights 5) (start) flickering and after a few minutes, they 6) (go) out. I 7) (try) calling our dad, but as his phone 8) (ring), the line 9) (go) dead. Chris and I were worried. We 10) (be) alone in the dark, the wind 11) (howl) outside and we 12) (not/have) any way to communicate with our parents. At that moment, we 13) (hear) Mum's voice calling us from the front door. We 14) (know) then that we 15) (be) safe!

7 Put the verbs into the *past simple* or the *past continuous* and join the sentences using *as*, *when* or *while*.

- 1 She/drive to work. Her car/break down. (when)
She was driving to work when her car broke down.
- 2 Vicky/water the garden. Nick/wash the dog. (while)
- 3 Mary/swim in the lake. She/feel a sharp pain in her ankle. (as)
- 4 Frank/jog in the park. A dog/start chasing him. (when)
- 5 Andrea/wait at the bus stop. She realised that a strange woman/stare at her. (as)
- 6 James/read his email. He/have his morning coffee. (while)
- 7 Sarah/sleep. The earthquake/start. (when)
- 8 Barbara/watch a film. John/surf the Net. (while)

8 Underline the correct item.

It was a lovely day in spring, and my sister and I 1) were hiking/would hike in the mountains. As it was my first time hiking, I 2) didn't get used to/wasn't used to walking long distances without stopping, so we 3) needed/were needing to take breaks every thirty or forty minutes.

We 4) rested/were resting under a shady tree, when we 5) heard/would hear a growling sound. We 6) used to turn/turned around and 7) were seeing/saw a huge brown bear approaching us.

In panic, we 8) threw/were throwing our backpacks on the ground and 9) were starting/started to run away. After a few minutes, we 10) looked/would look back to check if the bear 11) used to chase/was chasing us. Luckily, the bear was busy eating the food from our backpacks, and 12) wasn't caring/didn't care about us!

Feeling safe, we 13) were used to walking/walked back to town, where we 14) would tell/told everyone of our unusual experience.

Speaking

10 Look at the pictures. In pairs, describe the scene using the *past simple* and the *past continuous*. Use the ideas below to help you.

- sun/shine • my family and I/camp by the lake
- we/enjoy the view
- wolf/approach and start growling
- we/try not to panic
- we/not move at all
- after some minutes/wolf go away
- we/be a bit scared but relieved



It was a bright day in spring. The sun was shining...

Writing

11 Using your ideas from the Speaking activity above, write a story entitled '*An Unwelcome Visitor*'. Use the *past simple* and the *past continuous*. Use Ex. 8 as a model.