

Past Continuous vs Past Simple

We use the **past continuous**:

- for an action which was in progress at a stated time in the past.

The girls **were playing** volleyball at five o'clock in the afternoon.
(When did they start? We don't know.)

- for two or more actions happening at the same time in the past.

The children **were studying** while their mother **was cooking**.

- for an action which was in progress when another action interrupted it.

The action that interrupted it is in the past simple.

Mary **was cooking** when he **burnt** her hand.

We use the **past simple**:

- for an action that took place at a specific time in the past.

Simon **went** to camp **last month**.
(When did he go to camp? Last month.)

- actions which happened immediately one after the other in the past.

First she **made** the pizza, then she **put** it in the oven.

Time expressions used with the past continuous:

while, when, as, all day / night / morning, all day yesterday, etc.

Time expressions used with the past simple:

ago, yesterday, last month / week / year, in 2005, then, etc.

5 Underline the correct item.

- I **watched** / **was watching** a DVD when my cat **jumped** / **was jumping** on me.
- She **was buying** / **bought** a new dress last month.
- Greg **was sleeping** / **slept** while Joanne **listened** / **was listening** to her MP3 player.
- Mum **cooked** / **was cooking** dinner when someone **knocked** / **was knocking** on the door.
- Sue **was watering** / **watered** the flowers when it **started** / **start** to rain.
- They **were walking** / **walked** to school last Monday because there was no bus.
- I **ate** / **was eating** a sandwich while my parents **drank** / **were drinking** coffee.

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

- Jack ... **was playing** ... (**play**) a video game when his brother, Tom, ... **entered** ... (**enter**) the room.
- I (**study**) for my English test when my mother (**come**) home from work.
- I (**read**) a book when my sister (**leave**) for the cinema.
- Emma (**wash**) the dishes when the telephone (**ring**).
- I (**write**) an email when the lights (**go**) out.

7 Put the verbs in brackets into the *past simple* or the *past continuous*.

1 A: What 1) ... *were the children doing* ... (the children/do) when you 2) *returned* (return) home last night?

B: Kate 3) (watch) a DVD and Andrew 4) (do) his homework.

2 A: How 1) (Anne/break) her leg?

B: She 2) (ride) her horse when she 3) (fall) and 4) (land) on her leg.

A: 5) (she/go) to hospital?

B: Yes, she did.

3 A: When 1) (you/see) Peter?

B: While I 2) (do) my shopping at the supermarket.

4 A: I 1) (call) you last night but you 2) (not/answer). Where were you?

B: I 3) (jog) in the park.

5 A: 1) (you/hear) what happened to George?

B: No! Is he OK?

A: Well, he 2) (ride) his bike to school when a cat 3) (jump) out in front of him. He 4) (try) to stop but he 5) (fall) against a wall. Luckily, he 6) (not/be) hurt.

8 Read the letter and write the missing words. Write one word on each line.

Dear Georgia,

I'm writing to you from my hotel room 1) in Berlin. You can't imagine what happened to me yesterday! I was walking in Mitte at around noon 2) it started raining. 3) I was running back to the hotel, I saw a famous actor who was eating in a restaurant. I went in and 4) hello and he gave me two tickets to see his new film. Isn't that great?

That's all for now. See you 5) I get back!

Love,
Rachel