

A Study this example situation:



Yesterday Karen and Joe played tennis. They started at 10 o'clock and finished at 11.30. So, at 10.30 they **were playing** tennis.

they **were playing** = they were in the middle of playing, they had not finished.

was/were + -ing is the past continuous:

he/she/it	was	playing
we/you/they	were	doing
		working etc.

B I **was doing** something = I was in the middle of doing it at a certain time. The action or situation started before this time, but had not finished:

- This time last year I **was living** in Hong Kong.
- What **were** you **doing** at 10 o'clock last night?
- I waved to Helen, but she **wasn't looking**.

C Compare I **was doing** (past continuous) and I **did** (past simple):

I was doing (= in the middle of an action)

- We **were walking** home when I met Dan. (in the middle of walking home)
- Kate **was watching** TV when we arrived.

I did (= complete action)

- We **walked** home after the party last night. (= all the way, completely)
- Kate **watched** TV a lot when she was ill last year.

D You can say that something **happened** (past simple) in the middle of something else (past continuous):

- Matt **phoned** while we **were having** dinner.
- It **was raining** when I **got up**.
- I **saw** you in the park yesterday. You **were sitting** on the grass and **reading** a book.
- I **hurt** my back while I **was working** in the garden.

But we use the past simple to say that one thing happened after another:

- I **was walking** along the road when I **saw** Dan. So I **stopped**, and we **talked** for a while.

Compare:

<input type="checkbox"/> When Karen arrived, we were having dinner. (= we had already started before she arrived)	<input type="checkbox"/> When Karen arrived, we had dinner. (= Karen arrived, and then we had dinner)
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E Some verbs (for example, **know** and **want**) are not normally used in continuous forms (**is + -ing**, **was + -ing** etc.). See Unit 4A for a list of these verbs.

- We were good friends. We **knew** each other well. (not we were knowing)
- I was enjoying the party, but Chris **wanted** to go home. (not was wanting)

Exercises

6.1 Complete the sentences. Choose from:

was looking was wearing wasn't listening weren't looking
 was snowing was working were sitting were you going

- Today Helen is wearing a skirt. Yesterday she was wearing trousers.
- 'What did he say?' 'I don't know. I wasn't listening.'
- We were sitting at the back of the theatre. We couldn't hear very well.
- This time last year Steve was working on a farm.
- They didn't see me. They were you going in my direction.
- The weather was bad. It was very cold and it was snowing.
- I saw you in your car. Where were you going?
- I saw Kate a few minutes ago. She was looking for you.

6.2 Which goes with which?

- When I got to the cafe
- We fell asleep
- Amy learnt Italian
- Tom didn't come out with us
- The car began to make a strange noise
- The TV was on
- When I first met Jessica

- when she was living in Rome.
- she was working in a clothes shop.
- when I was driving home.
- but nobody was watching it.
- while we were watching a film.
- my friends were waiting for me.
- because he wasn't feeling well.

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6.3 Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.



I saw Sue in town yesterday, but she wasn't looking at me. She was walking the other way.



I was cycling home yesterday when a man wasn't looking (step) out into the road in front of me. I were quite fast, but luckily I managed to stop in time, and I didn't hit him.

6.4 Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.

- Jenny was waiting (wait) for me when I arrived (arrive).
- 'What were you doing (you / do) at this time yesterday?' 'I was asleep.'
- 'Were you going (you / go) out last night?' 'No, I was too tired.'
- How fast were you driving (you / drive) when the accident happened (happen)?
- Sam was taking (take) a picture of me while I wasn't looking (not / look).
- We were in a very difficult position. We were (not / know) what to do, so we did nothing.
- I haven't seen Alan for ages. When I last saw (see) him, he was trying (try) to find a job.
- I was walking (walk) along the street when suddenly I heard (hear) something behind me. Somebody was following (follow) me. I was scared and I started (start) to run.
- When I was young, I wanted (want) to be a pilot. Later I changed (change) my mind.
- Last night I was dropping (drop) a plate when I was doing (do) the washing up. Fortunately it didn't break (not / break).

→ Additional exercise 1 (page 302)

LIVEWORKSHEETS