

Simple Past vs. Past Continuous



When do we use
each tense?

Simple Past vs. Past Continuous

Simple Past

We use the **simple past** to talk about:

Completed actions, **habits** and **facts** in the past.

- I **went** to the cinema **yesterday**.
- I **always visited** my grandparents in my summer holidays **when I was little**.
- I **lived** near Liverpool for a couple of years.



Past Continuous

The **past continuous** is used to express:

Interrupted actions, **specific time** as an **interruption** and **parallel** actions.

- I **was watching** TV **when** the phone rang.
- **Last night at 7pm**, I **was having** dinner.
- **While** she **was doing** her homework her brother **was playing** football.



Important Note about Past Continuous!

Some verbs are NOT typically used in the continuous tense. Instead, we prefer to use these verbs in the simple tenses (simple present or past).

These verbs are called **STATIVE** (or non-action) verbs. Here are some examples:

want	like	love	hate
know	need	see	hear
believe	understand	have (possession)	
Forget	remember	belong	

Examples:

I liked Rome.

NOT: I was liking Rom



She had a headache.

NOT: She was having a headache.

I knew the answer.

NOT: I was knowing the answer.

Past Progressive & Simple Past 1



Use past progressive with simple past to describe an action that was interrupted by another action.



They **were enjoying** the morning when the thief **stole** the briefcase.



past

were enjoying

stole

now

future

Past Progressive & Simple Past 2



Use past progressive for the action in progress. Use *when* and the simple past for the action that interrupts.



The man **was reading** the newspaper when the thief **snatched** his briefcase.



past

was reading

snatched

now

future

Practice 2

Form sentences with while. Use the past progressive.

Example: read / steal

While the man **was reading**, the prisoner **was stealing** his wallet.



1. talk / drink
2. shine / splash



3. play / watch



4. not look / burn
5. talk / sit

5. While the woman **was talking** on the phone, the man **was sitting** in the chair.

Put the verbs into the correct tense (simple past or past progressive).

1. When I (do) was doing the washing-up, I (break) broke a plate.
2. While Tom (play) _____ the piano, his mother (do) _____ the washing-up.
3. He (drink) _____ some juice and then he (eat) _____ a few chips.
4. I (have) _____ dinner when I suddenly (hear) _____ a loud bang.
5. When my father (work) _____ in the garden, an old friend (pass) _____ by to see him.
6. She (go) _____ to school, (take) _____ out her textbook and (begin) _____ to learn.
7. When it (start) _____ to rain, our dog (want) _____ to come inside.
8. When Jane (do) _____ a language course in Ireland, she (visit) _____ Blarney Castle.
9. When I (be) _____ on my way home, I (see) _____ an accident.
10. I (not / understand) _____ what they (talk) _____ about.

Put the verbs into the correct tense (Simple Past or Past Progressive).

1. When I (get) _____ up yesterday, the sun (shine) _____.
2. It (is) _____ a beautiful morning.
3. So I (decide) _____ to cycle around a little.
4. I (go) _____ to the shed and (take) _____ out my bike.
5. While I (cycle) _____ past some villages, I (see) _____ some people in their gardens.
6. One man (mow) _____ the grass while his wife (pick) _____ strawberries.
7. After one hour of cycling in sunshine, a big fat raincloud suddenly (appear) _____ and it (start) _____ to rain.
8. Luckily, a farmer (notice) _____ me and (tell) _____ me to come in.
9. While it (rain) _____ outside, I (sit) _____ in the farmer's house.
10. After a while, the sun (come) _____ out again.
11. I (thank) _____ the farmer for his hospitality and (move) _____ on.