

## Past continuous (I was doing)

A

Study this example situation:



Yesterday Karen and Jim 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 playing.

**Was/were -ing** is the *past continuous*:

I/he/she/it	<b>was</b>	<b>playing</b>
we/you/they	<b>were</b>	<b>doing</b>
		<b>working</b> etc.

B

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

I started doing

I was doing

I finished doing

past

past

now

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

C

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

*Past continuous* (in the middle of an action)

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

*Past simple* (complete action)

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

D

We often use the past simple and the past continuous together to say that something happened in the middle of something else:

- ☐ 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 **had** a chat.

Compare:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> When Karen arrived, we <b>were having</b> dinner. (= we had already started before she arrived) | <input type="checkbox"/> When Karen arrived, we <b>had</b> dinner. (= Karen arrived, and then we had dinner) |
|--|--|

E

Some verbs (for example, **know** and **want**) are not normally used in the continuous (see Unit 4A):

- ☐ 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** What were you doing at these times? Write sentences as in the examples. The past continuous is not always necessary (see the second example).

- 1 (at 8 o'clock yesterday evening) I was having dinner.
- 2 (at 5 o'clock last Monday) I was on a bus on my way home.
- 3 (at 10.15 yesterday morning) .....
- 4 (at 4.30 this morning) .....
- 5 (at 7.45 yesterday evening) .....
- 6 (half an hour ago) .....

**6.2** Use your own ideas to complete the sentences. Use the past continuous.

- 1 Matt phoned while we were having dinner.
- 2 The doorbell rang while I .....
- 3 The car began to make a strange noise when we .....
- 4 Jessica fell asleep while she .....
- 5 The television was on, but nobody .....

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

<p>1</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>I <u>saw</u> (see) Sue in town yesterday, but she ..... (not / see) me. She ..... (look) the other way.</p>	<p>I ..... (meet) Tom and Jane at the airport a few weeks ago. They ..... (go) to Paris and I ..... (go) to Rome. We ..... (have) a chat while we ..... (wait) for our flights.</p>	<p>I ..... (cycle) home yesterday when a man ..... (step) out into the road in front of me. I ..... (go) quite fast, but luckily I ..... (manage) to stop in time and ..... (not / hit) him.</p>

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

- 1 Jenny was waiting (wait) for me when I arrived (arrive).
- 2 'What ..... (you / do) at this time yesterday?' 'I was asleep.'
- 3 '..... (you / go) out last night?' 'No, I was too tired.'
- 4 How fast ..... (you / drive) when the accident ..... (happen)?
- 5 Sam ..... (take) a picture of me while I ..... (not / look).
- 6 We were in a very difficult position. We ..... (not / know) what to do.
- 7 I haven't seen Alan for ages. When I last ..... (see) him, he ..... (try) to find a job.
- 8 I ..... (walk) along the street when suddenly I ..... (hear) footsteps behind me. Somebody ..... (follow) me. I was scared and I ..... (start) to run.
- 9 When I was young, I ..... (want) to be a pilot.
- 10 Last night I ..... (drop) a plate when I ..... (do) the washing-up. Fortunately it ..... (not / break).

**UNIT 6****6.1***Example answers:*

- 3 I was working.
- 4 I was in bed asleep.
- 5 I was getting ready to go out.
- 6 I was watching TV at home.

**6.2***Example answers:*

- 2 was having a shower
- 3 were driving home
- 4 was reading the paper
- 5 was watching it

**6.3**

- 1 didn't see ... was looking
- 2 met ... were going ... was going ...  
had ... were waiting / waited
- 3 was cycling ... stepped ...  
was going ... managed ...  
didn't hit

**6.4**

- 2 were you doing
- 3 Did you go
- 4 were you driving ... happened
- 5 took ... wasn't looking
- 6 didn't know
- 7 saw ... was trying
- 8 was walking ... heard ... was  
following ... started
- 9 wanted
- 10 dropped ... was doing ... didn't break