

Past continuous (I was doing)

A Study this example situation:



Yesterday Karen and Joe played tennis. They started at 10 o'clock and finished at 11.30.

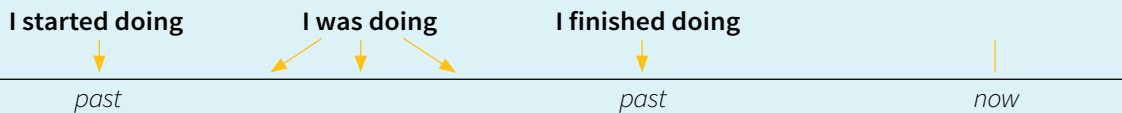
So, at 10.30 they **were playing** tennis.

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 doing
we/you/they	were	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
- We at the back of the theatre. We couldn't hear very well.
- This time last year Steve on a farm.
- They didn't see me. They in my direction.
- The weather was bad. It was very cold and it
- I saw you in your car. Where?
- I saw Kate a few minutes ago. She 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

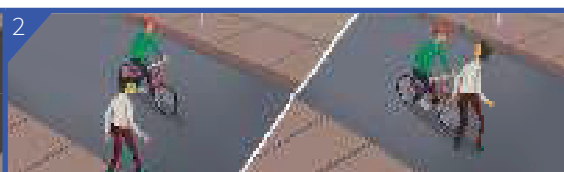
- when she was living in Rome.
- she was working in a clothes shop.
- when I was driving home.
- but nobody was watching it.
- while we were watching a film.
- ~~my friends were waiting for me.~~
- because he wasn't feeling well.

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



I saw (see) Sue in town yesterday, but she (not/see) me. She (look) the other way.



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 I (not/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 (you / do) at this time yesterday?' 'I was asleep.'
- '..... (you / go) out last night?' 'No, I was too tired.'
- How fast (you / drive) when the accident (happen)?
- Sam (take) a picture of me while I (not / look).
- We were in a very difficult position. We (not / know) what to do, so we (do) nothing.
- I haven't seen Alan for ages. When I last (see) him, he (try) to find a job.
- I (walk) along the street when suddenly I (hear) something behind me. Somebody (follow) me. I was scared and I (start) to run.
- When I was young, I (want) to be a pilot. Later I (change) my mind.
- Last night I (drop) a plate when I (do) the washing up. Fortunately it (not / break).