

# Past Continuous versus Past Simple

## Past Continuous

We use the past continuous for:

- an action which was in progress (was happening) at a stated time in the past. We do not know when the action started or finished.



At nine o'clock yesterday morning, the plane **was flying** to Tahiti from New York. (We do not know when it left or reached its destination.)

- two actions which were happening at the same time in the past.



He **was listening** carefully while they **were explaining** the plan to him.

## Past Simple

We use the past simple for:

- a complete action at a stated time in the past.



The plane **landed** at the airport at eight o'clock yesterday morning. (The time is stated. The action is complete. The plane landed.)

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



First she **read** the advertisement and then she **called** the company.

### 10 Put the verbs in brackets into the past continuous or the past simple.

- We **went** (go) swimming every week when we were young.
- Simon..... (dance) when he fell and hurt his leg.
- Why ..... (you/laugh) all through your history lesson yesterday?
- I ..... (drink) a glass of milk every day when I was a child.
- Todd often ..... (ride) horses when he was a boy.
- Bill ..... (write) a letter when his mother came home.
- It ..... (rain) while I was waiting for the bus.
- I ..... (play) the guitar when I was young, but I don't any more.
- Debbie ..... (sing) in the school choir many years ago.
- Liz ..... (clean) the windows when I saw her.

### 11 Put the verbs in brackets into the past continuous or the past simple.

- A Steve 1) **had** (have) an accident yesterday. He 2) ..... (drive) his car when a bird 3) ..... (fly) into the windscreen. He 4) ..... (try) to stop quickly but he 5) ..... (crash) into a wall. Luckily, he 6) ..... (not/be) hurt.
- B Last week, I 1) ..... (go) to a talk by a famous writer. He 2) ..... (talk) about his new book when I 3) ..... (arrive). He 4) ..... (give) such an interesting talk that I 5) ..... (be) disappointed when it 6) ..... (end).
- C Julie 1) ..... (tidy) her bedroom last weekend. While she 2) ..... (tidy) it, she 3) ..... (find) some of the toys she 4) ..... (have) when she was a child. She 5) ..... (not/want) to throw them away, so she 6) ..... (put) them in a box and 7) ..... (store) them in the attic.

**12** Put the verbs in brackets into the past continuous or the past simple. Then, put the pictures in the right order.



It 1) *...was...* (be) a beautiful spring morning when Emma and her father 2) ..... (decide) to visit Seaton Castle. The sun 3) ..... (shine) and the birds 4) ..... (sing). Emma 5) ..... (feel) very excited. The castle 6) ..... (be) very old and made of stone. They 7) ..... (climb) the steps to the top of the tower. While they 8) ..... (admire) the view, they 9) ..... (hear) some noises. They 10) ..... (look) around but they 11) ..... (not/see) anybody. 'That's funny,' said Emma. 'I 12) ..... (think) I 13) ..... (see) someone standing over there.' After a while they 14) ..... (decide) to visit the cellar of the castle. Emma 15) ..... (examine) an old barrel when she 16) ..... (hear) the door of the cellar close behind them. 'Dad,' she 17) ..... (say), 'don't close the door!' 'But, I 18) ..... (not/close) it, dear,' her father said. Emma 19) ..... (turn) around and 20) ..... (see) a shadow on the wall. She 21) ..... (know) then that the ghost of Seaton Castle 22) ..... (watch) them!

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

Dear Rick,

I'm writing to you from my hotel in Switzerland. I'm having a lovely time here but you can't imagine what 1) *...happened...* (happen) to me yesterday. I 2) ..... (be) on the mountain with my friends and we 3) ..... (have) a lovely time because the snow 4) ..... (be) perfect for skiing. Unfortunately the sun 5) ..... (shine) on the snow, so it 6) ..... (be) difficult to see. Suddenly, I 7) ..... (hit) a rock and I 8) ..... (fall) over. Luckily I 9) ..... (not/be) seriously hurt — I just 10) ..... (get) a few bruises. Now I'm trying to be more careful! I'll see you when I get back.

Best wishes,  
Kevin

**14** Correct the mistakes.

- Philip was washing the car while the fire started.
- Neil was studying when his sister was listening to music.
- Harriet was opening the door and walked into the house.
- We were having lunch at a lovely restaurant every day when we were on holiday.
- Brian drank tea at five o'clock yesterday afternoon.
- Dad was repairing the TV while Mum cooked dinner.
- I was going to the cinema last Saturday.
- I was buying a new dress for my party yesterday.
- While Jeff built the garden shed, he hurt himself.
- While the teacher were speaking, the students were listening to him.

# Revision Box

**15** Put the verbs in brackets into the present continuous, present simple, past simple or past continuous.

- I ...*was cleaning*... (clean) the windows when the telephone ..... (ring).
- 'What is that noise?' 'James ..... (repair) his bike at the moment.'
- He ..... (read) a book when his mother ..... (call) him.
- '..... (be) you busy?' 'No, what ..... (you/want) me to do?'
- They ..... (sing) while we ..... (play) some music.
- Susan is a nurse. She usually ..... (work) at night.

**16** Choose the correct answer.

- The earth ...*B*... round the sun.  
A moved      B moves      C is moving
- Sarah ..... a new car last week.  
A is buying      B buy      C bought
- I ..... when suddenly the dog began to bark.  
A study      B studied      C was studying
- They ..... hard at the moment.  
A are working      B were working      C worked
- I ..... home from work when it began to snow.  
A am walking      B walk      C was walking
- Jane ..... the receiver and dialled the number.  
A lifts      B was lifting      C lifted
- Walt Disney ..... Mickey Mouse.  
A was creating      B creates      C created
- Helen ..... to the gym every day, but now she doesn't.  
A used to go      B didn't use to go      C was going
- We ..... for a new house at the moment.  
A are looking      B look      C looked
- Ted ..... his father in the garden every Sunday.  
A was helping      B helps      C is helping
- The ferry to Calais ..... at 3 o'clock every day.  
A leave      B leaves      C was leaving
- You ..... your music too loud! I can't stand it!  
A were always playing      B always play  
C are always playing

## ORAL Activity

Look at the picture. It shows what the people were doing/did when a bank robbery happened. In pairs, ask and answer questions using the prompts below as in the example.

- e.g. SA: What was the manager doing?  
SB: He was talking on the phone.  
SA: What did he do when he saw the robbers?  
SB: He stood up.

- manager / talk on the phone / stand up  
cashier / count some money / put his hands up  
child / sit on a chair / start to cry  
old lady / wait in the queue / faint



## WRITING Activity

Imagine that one of the people who saw the robbery is writing a letter to a friend to tell him/her what was happening/ happened on that day. Using the picture and your notes from the Oral Activity, complete the letter.

Dear ..... (friend's name),

I'm writing to tell you what happened to me yesterday while I was depositing some money in the bank.

I was standing in the queue when two bank robbers suddenly appeared at the door. ....

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