

## 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.

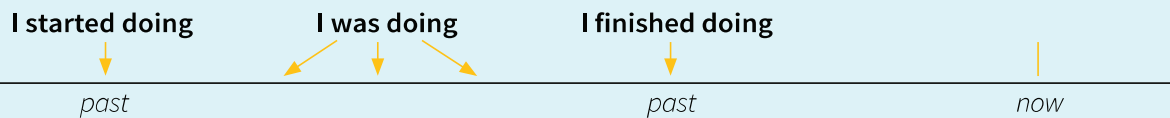
they **were playing** =

they were in the middle of playing, they had not finished

**was/were + -ing** is the past continuous:

he/she/it	<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 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:

- When Karen arrived, we **were having** dinner. (= we had already started before she arrived)
- When Karen arrived, we **had** dinner. (= Karen arrived, and then we had dinner)

**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.

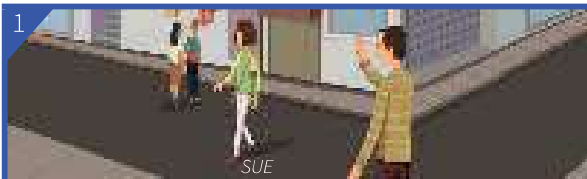
## 6.2 Which goes with which?

- 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

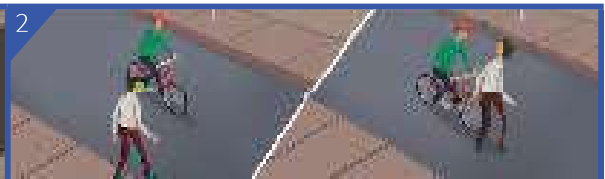
- when she was living in Rome.
- she was working in a clothes shop.
- when I was driving home.
- but nobody was watching it.
- while we were watching a film.
- ~~my friends were waiting for me.~~
- because he wasn't feeling well.

- f
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

## 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).