

THE PAST CONTINUOUS

ACTIVITY TYPE

Reading, Writing, Grammar,
Exercises

LANGUAGE FOCUS

The past continuous

AIM

To learn and practice the past
continuous in English

LEVEL

Elementary, Intermediate

TIME

60 minutes

INTRODUCTION

After going through your regular review and teacher talk, tell the students that they're going to learn the past continuous in English

PREPARATION

Make one copy of the worksheet for each student

PROCEDURE

Give one copy of the worksheet to each student.
Go through the grammar and exercises together.

WRAP UP

Ask the students if they have any doubts.
Thank them for coming to the lesson.

Past Continuous

FORM Past Continuous

[WAS / WERE] + [VERB+ing]

EXAMPLES:

I was studying when she called.

I was carefully picking up the snake when it bit me.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Past Continuous (was picking), adverbs often come between the first part and the second part (was carefully picking).

IMPORTANT

Clauses are groups of words which have meaning but are not complete sentences. Some clauses begin with the word *when* such as "...when she called " or "...when it bit me." Clauses with the Past Continuous usually start with *while*. *While* expresses the idea

"during the time." Study the examples below. They have the same meaning.

EXAMPLES:

I was studying when she called.

While I was studying, she called.

USE 1 Interrupted Action in the Past



Use the Past Continuous to indicate that a longer action in the past was interrupted. The interruption is usually an action in the Simple Past. Remember this can be a real interruption or just an interruption in time.

EXAMPLES:

I was watching TV when she called.

When the phone rang, she was writing a letter.

While we were having a picnic, it started to rain.

Sally was working when Joe had the car accident.

While John was sleeping last night, someone stole his car.

USE 2 Specific Time as an Interruption



In USE 1, described above, the Past Continuous is interrupted by an action in the Simple Past. However, you can also use a specific time as an interruption.

EXAMPLES:

Last night at 6 p.m., I was eating dinner.

At midnight, we were still driving through the desert.

IMPORTANT

In the Simple Past a specific time is used to show when an action began or finished. In the Past Continuous a specific time only interrupts the action.

EXAMPLES:

Last night at 6 p.m., I ate dinner.

(I started eating at 6 p.m.)

Last night at 6 p.m., I was eating dinner.

(I started earlier and at 6 p.m. I was in the process of eating dinner.)

USE 3 Parallel Actions



When you use the Past Continuous with two actions in the same sentence, it expresses the idea that both actions were happening at the same time. The actions are parallel.

EXAMPLES:

I was studying while he was making dinner.

While Ellen was reading, Tim was watching television.

They were eating dinner, discussing their plans and having a good time.

USE 4 Atmosphere

In English we often use a series of Parallel Actions to describe atmosphere in the past.

EXAMPLE:

When I walked into the office, several people were busily typing, some were talking on the phones, the boss was yelling directions, and customers were waiting to be helped. One customer was yelling at a secretary and waving his hands. Others were complaining to each other about the bad service.

USE 5 Repetition and Irritation with

"Always"	XXXXXX	
	Past	Present

The Past Continuous with words such as *always* or *constantly* expresses the idea that something irritating or shocking often happened in the past. The concept is very similar to the expression

used to but with negative emotion. Remember to put the words *always* or *constantly* between "be" and "verb+ing."

EXAMPLES:

She was always coming to class late.

He was constantly talking. He annoyed everyone.

I didn't like them because they were always complaining.

IMPORTANT Non-Continuous Verbs/ Mixed Verbs

It is important to remember that Non-Continuous Verbs cannot be used in any "continuous" tenses. Also, certain "non-continuous" meanings for Mixed Verbs cannot be used in "continuous" tenses. To express the idea of Past Continuous with these verbs, you must use Simple Past.

EXAMPLES:

Jane was being at my house when you arrived. **Not Correct**

Jane was at my house when you arrived. **Correct**

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1.

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verbs in brackets.

e.g. *Yesterday at 4:00 p m the inspector was looking for (to look for) the murderer.*

1. When I _____ (to look through) the magazine I found an interesting article.
2. When I _____ (to look at) the departure board, the train arrived.
3. Mary _____ (to not feel) very well yesterday.
4. When the team of archaeologists _____ (to investigate) they found a mummy.
5. Last night when I knelt on the floor, I (to ask Kathy to marry) _____ me.

EXERCISE 2.

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verbs in brackets.

e.g. Inspector: "What were you doing on 17th May at 9:00 a.m.?"

Mr. Smith: "I _____ (to drive) my lorry I that day, I am a truck driver"

Inspector: "Where were you on the night of the crime?"

Mr. Smith: "I _____ (to have dinner) with my family."

Inspector: "And, what about yesterday at 6:00 p.m.?"

Mr. Smith: "I _____ (to ride) my bicycle".

Inspector: " Well! This morning we _____ (to look) for clues at the

_____ scene of the crime and we found your fingerprints all over the place!"