

English Verbs: Past Continuous

This verb tense is used to describe a long event in the past, with reference to another short event or time. The format is:

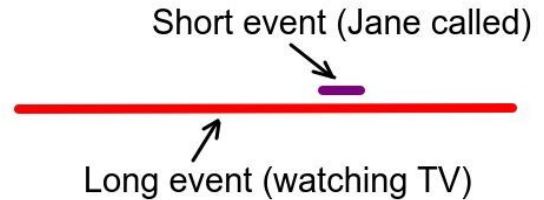
Positive: was/were ___ing
Negative: wasn't/weren't ___ing
(I/he/she/it **was**, you/we/they **were**)

The short event is referred to using the **past simple**. We often use the linking words “**when**” or “**while**” to link the two events.

Examples:

I **was watching** TV when Jane called me.

Jane called me while I **was watching** TV.



Positives:

- She **was checking** her emails **when** the phone rang.
- **While** we **were having** a picnic, it started to rain.
- The computer lost power **while** I **was writing** the email.
- I opened a bottle of wine **while** I **was cooking** the dinner.

Negatives:

- John **wasn't waiting** for us **when** we arrived at the airport.
- Bob **wasn't sleeping** last night **when** somebody stole his car.
- **When** you told me about it, I **wasn't listening**.
- **When** you called me, I **wasn't driving**.

Questions:

- A: What **were** you **doing** at 7:30 last night? B: I **was watching** TV.
- A: What **were** you **doing** when the earthquake started? B: I **was studying**.
- A: What **were** you **doing** when you broke your leg? B: I **was snowboarding**.
- **Was** Bob **sleeping when** somebody stole his car?
- **Were** you **sleeping** yesterday **when** I called?

Exercise 1. Complete the sentences using “*was*”, “*were*”, “*wasn't*” or “*weren't*”.

1. Boris _____ learning English last year.
2. They _____ (not) swimming in the lake at the weekend.
3. Your father _____ repairing the car all afternoon.
4. I _____ reading a magazine yesterday evening.
5. My friends _____ watching TV all day.
6. It _____ (not) raining on Sunday.
7. The dog _____ (not) barking when I woke up.
8. The children _____ singing a song when we arrived.

Exercise 2. Put the verbs into the Past Continuous form.

Example: When I called my friends, they (play) were playing a video game.

1. Yesterday at 6pm, I (prepare) _____ dinner.
2. The kids (play) _____ in the garden when I arrived.
3. Josh (not/work) _____ in his office last week.
4. (she/walk) _____ in the park yesterday ?
5. My friends (swim) _____ in the pool all afternoon.
6. I tried to tell them, but they (not/listen) _____ to me.
7. What (you/do) _____ yesterday at 8pm ?
8. (you/talk) _____ with Paul in class today ?
9. I _____ (take) a shower when the telephone rang.
10. The police stopped my car while I _____ (drive) to work yesterday.

Exercise 3. Put the verbs in the correct forms, using the “past simple” and “past continuous”.

Example: We were eating (eat) breakfast when the doorbell rang (ring).

1. It _____ (start) to rain while she _____ (feed) the dogs.
2. The students _____ (not / study) when the teacher _____ (come) in.
3. He _____ (meet) his friend John while he _____ (work) in Paris.
4. When I _____ (open) the door, it _____ (not/rain).
5. He _____ (hear) thunder while he _____ (talk) to his friend.
6. We _____ (eat) our dinner yesterday when the police _____ (knock) on our door.
7. While we _____ (visit) the zoo on Saturday, the pain in my back _____ (start).
8. He _____ (text) on his phone when he _____ (hit) another car.

Exercise 4. Use your imagination to complete the following:

1. I _____ a book when someone _____ me.
2. While we _____ TV, someone _____ the window.
3. He _____ the dishes when his wife _____ .