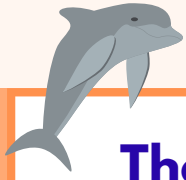


The Continuous Aspect Explained



The continuous aspect

1 Continuous verb forms express activities, or a series of activities, that happen at some point between their beginning and end. The continuous aspect focuses on the duration of activity: we are aware of the passing of time. The activity is not permanent, and its duration is temporary.

Examples:

- I'm **staying** with friends until I find a place of my own. (temporary)
- Why **are you wearing** those silly trousers? (in progress)
- I've **been learning** English for years. (duration)



2 The activity may not be complete.

- I've **been painting** the fence of the garden. (We don't know if it's finished.)
- He **was dying**, but the doctors saved him. (He didn't 'finish' dying.) Who's **been eating** my cheese? (There's some left.)

Compare: Who's **eaten** my cheese? (It's all gone.)

3 The continuous aspect is generally avoided with state verbs, which by their nature express permanence and not specific duration.

- I **understand** your situation. I **love** chocolate.

4 The action of many verbs, by definition, lasts a long time, for example, live and work. The use of the continuous aspect gives these actions limited duration and makes them temporary.

- Hans **is living** in London while he's **learning** English.
- I'm **working** as a waiter until I go to university.

5 The action of some other verbs lasts a short time. These are often found in the simple aspect.

- She's **cut** her finger. He **hit** me.



6 In the continuous aspect, the action of these verbs becomes longer or repeated.

- I've **been cutting** wood, (for a long time)
- He **was hitting** me. (again and again)



Note

7 It has become common recently to use the continuous aspect even with state verbs, to add a sense of immediacy in a colloquial context.

- I'm **liking** your new hairstyle!
- I'm really **wishing** she hadn't come!