

# THE PAST CONTINUOUS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPLAINED WITH EXERCISES.



Study this example situation:



Yesterday Vanessa and Marcus played tennis. They started at 17 o'clock and finished at 18.00.

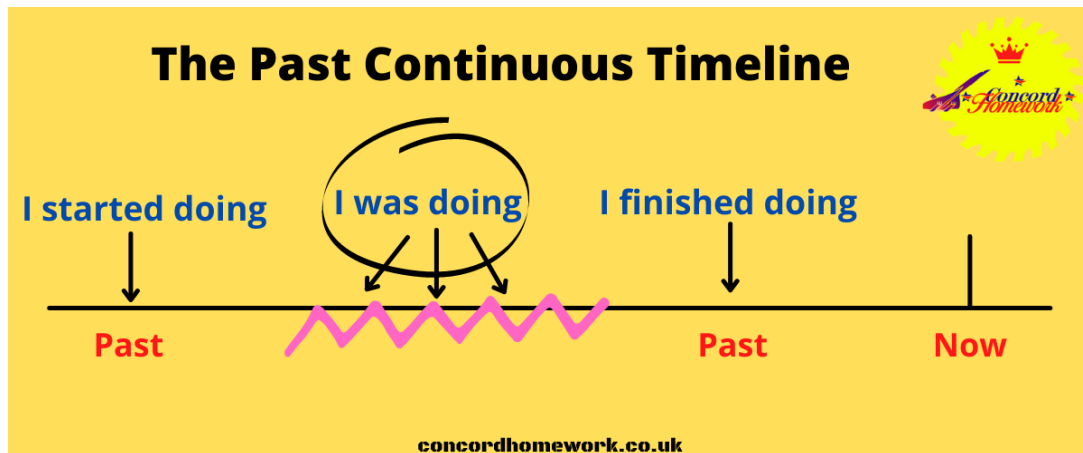
So, at 17.30 they **were playing** tennis.

They **were playing** = they were in the middle of playing. They had not finished playing.

**Was/were -ing** is the past continuous:

I/he/she/it | **was** | **playing**  
we/you/they | **were** | **playing**

**I was doing** something = I was in the middle of doing something at a certain time. The action or situation had already started before this time, but had not finished:



Some examples:

This time last year I **was living** in Turkey.

What **were** you **doing** at 12 o'clock last night?

I waved to Sarah, but she **wasn't looking**.

**Compare the past continuous (I was doing) and past simple (I did):**

**Past continuous (in the middle of an action)**

- I **was walking** home when I met Judy. (in the middle of walking home)
- James **was watching** TV when we arrived.

**Past simple (complete action)**

- I **walked** home after the party last night. (= all the way, completely)
- James **watched** television a lot when he was ill last year.

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We often use the past simple and the past continuous together to say that something happened in the middle of something else:

Jake **phoned** while we **were having** lunch.

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 **had** a chat.

**Compare:**

When James arrived, we **were having** dinner. (= we had already started before she arrived)

When James arrived, we **had** dinner. (= James arrived, and then we had dinner)

Some verbs (for example, know and want) are not normally used in the continuous.

We were good friends. We **knew** each other well. (not We were knowing)

I was enjoying the party, but Ken **wanted** to go home. (not was wanting)



# THE PAST CONTINUOUS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPLAINED WITH EXERCISES.



Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.

1



I ..... (see) Eve in town yesterday, but she ..... (not / see) me. She ..... (look) the other way.

2



I ..... (meet) Frank and Ashley at the airport a few weeks ago. They ..... (go) to London and I ..... (go) to Istanbul. We ..... (have) a chat while we ..... (wait) for our flights.

3



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 ..... (not / hit) him.



Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.



- 1 My mum ..... (wait) for me when I ..... (arrive).
- 2 'What ..... (you / do) at this time yesterday?' 'I was asleep.'
- 3 '..... (you / go) out last night?' 'No, I was too tired.'
- 4 How fast ..... (you / drive) when the accident ..... (happen)?
- 5 Matt ..... (take) a picture of me while I ..... (not / look).
- 6 We were in a very difficult position. We ..... (not / know) what to do.
- 7 I haven't seen Peter for ages. When I last ..... (see) him, he ..... (try) to find a job.
- 8 I ..... (walk) along the street when suddenly I ..... (hear) footsteps behind me. Somebody ..... (follow) me. I was scared and I ..... (start) to run.
- 9 When I was young, I ..... (want) to be a pilot.
- 10 Last night I ..... (drop) a plate when I ..... (do) the washing-up. Fortunately it ..... (not/break).



Complete the passage. Use the past simple or past continuous of the verbs in brackets.

A funny thing (1) ..... (happen) while I (2) ..... (fly) to London last summer. When I (3) ..... (get) on the plane, I (4)..... (take off) my jacket and put it in the overhead compartment. When the passenger next to me (5)..... (sit) down, I was surprised to see that she (6)..... (wear) the same jacket as me.

Anyway, the plane (7)..... (land) and we went to pick up our bags at the luggage carousel. While I (8)..... (wait) for my bags, I (9)..... (decide) to listen to some music.

But when I (10) ..... (look) for my MP3 player in my jacket pocket, it (11)..... (not be) there. Then I realised I had the woman's jacket - and she had mine!





# THE PAST CONTINUOUS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPLAINED WITH EXERCISES.



## Answer Key

Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.

1



I **saw** (see) Eve in town yesterday, but she **didn't see** (not / see) me. She **was looking** (look) the other way.

2



I **met** (meet) Frank and Ashley at the airport a few weeks ago. They **were going** (go) to London and I **was going** (go) to Istanbul. We **had** (have) a chat while we **were waiting/waited** (wait) for our flights.

3



I **was cycling** (cycle) home yesterday when a man **stepped** (step) out into the road in front of me. I **was going** (go) quite fast, but luckily I **managed** (manage) to stop in time and **didn't hit** (not / hit) him.



Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.



- My mum **was waiting** (wait) for me when I **arrived** (arrive).
- 'What **were you doing** (you / do) at this time yesterday?' 'I was asleep.'
- '**Did you go** (you / go) out last night?' 'No, I was too tired.'
- How fast **were you driving** (you / drive) when the accident **happened** (happen)?
- Matt **took** (take) a picture of me while I **wasn't looking** (not / look).
- We were in a very difficult position. We **didn't know** (not / know) what to do.
- I haven't seen Peter for ages. When I last **saw** (see) him, he **was trying** (try) to find a job.
- I **was walking** (walk) along the street when suddenly I **heard** (hear) footsteps behind me. Somebody **was following** (follow) me. I was scared and I **started** (start) to run.
- When I was young, I **wanted** (want) to be a pilot.
- Last night I **dropped** (drop) a plate when I **was doing** (do) the washing-up. Fortunately it **didn't break** (not/break).



Complete the passage. Use the past simple or past continuous of the verbs in brackets. Listen and check.

A funny thing (1) **happened** (happen) while I (2) **was flying** (fly) to London last summer. When I (3) **got** (get) on the plane, I (4) **took off** (take off) my jacket and put it in the overhead compartment. When the passenger next to me (5) **sat** (sit) down, I was surprised to see that she (6) **was wearing** (wear) the same jacket as me.

Anyway, the plane (7) **landed** (land) and we went to pick up our bags at the luggage carousel. While I (8) **was waiting** (wait) for my bags, I (9) **decided** (decide) to listen to some music.

But when I (10) **looked** (look) for my MP3 player in my jacket pocket, it (11) **wasn't** (not be) there. Then I realised I had the woman's jacket - and she had mine!

