

Past Simple

We use the past simple for

- ❖ **A short completed action**

He opened the car door.

- ❖ **A sequence of actions**

He opened the door, got out and walked towards the animal.

- ❖ **Stories and description of past events**

One day the Princess decided that she didn't like staying at home.

- ❖ The simple past is often used with words referring to finished times (e.g., yesterday morning, last month etc.).

Past Continuous (or Progressive)

We use the past continuous for

- ❖ An unfinished or continuing activity

He was trying to switch on his camera.

The lion was looking at them.

- ❖ Something that was in progress around a particular time

What were you doing at eight o'clock yesterday? I was watching TV.

- ❖ A background situation

The phone rang while I was having dinner.

Mozart died while he was composing the Requiem.

Past Continuous (2)

NOT USED

❖ Repeated actions

I rang the bell six times NOT I was ringing the bell six times

❖ With state verbs* (like, love, need, own, want, believe)

She said she believed Joe was dying.

*These verbs often describe states that last for some time.

Past Continuous/Past Simple

We often use the past continuous and the past simple in the same sentence to talk about two things that happened at the same time.

We often use when and while to link the two events in sentences like this.

- ❖ They were driving home when they heard a strange noise.
- ❖ While we were walking in the woods, we got lost.

Past Continuous/Past Simple (2)

We often make questions in the past continuous to ask about activities at the time of a key event.

- ❖ What were you doing when you first saw the shark?

We often make questions in the past simple to ask about actions after a key event.

- ❖ What did you do when the shark swam away?

while/when

You can use *when* with the past simple and the past continuous.

- ❖ When I was driving home, I heard a strange noise.
- ❖ While I was driving home, I heard a strange noise.

However, we don't normally use *while* with the past simple.

- ❖ I was swimming in the sea when I saw a dolphin NOT while I saw...