

# Grammar Reference

## Past simple and past continuous

### Meaning and use

We use the past simple for something that happened and finished in the past. We use it when we say or know the time when something happened. It is often used in stories, when one thing happened after another.

*Last year, we **travelled** by jeep across the Sahara.*

*When the car **stopped**, we all **got** out.*

We use the past continuous for something that happened in the past but was not finished at a particular time. This can be an exact time in the past (12 o'clock, etc.) or the time when another thing happened.

*It was 12 o'clock and we **were standing** in the midday sun.*

*Mick **was checking** the engine when the rescue helicopter arrived.*

We also use the past continuous to describe a scene or situation in the past or for an action that continued for some time.

*The stars **were beginning** to come out.*

*The dog **was barking** loudly.*

### Form

#### Past simple: positive

For regular verbs, the past simple ends in **-ed**. Irregular verbs have different forms. The past simple form is the same for all persons (*I, you, he, she, etc.*).

*Suddenly the jeep **skidded** and **stopped**.*

*Jake **thought** that we had a puncture.*

#### Past continuous: positive

The past continuous is **subject + was/were + -ing form**. There are no short forms of **was/were**.

*Fortunately, we **were carrying** a toolkit.*

#### Past simple: negative

We make the negative past simple with **didn't + infinitive**.

*We **didn't stay** inside the jeep because that was even hotter.*

#### Past continuous: negative

We make the negative past continuous with **wasn't/weren't + -ing form**

*Despite the heat, Jess and Debs **weren't wearing** hats.*

#### Past simple: question

The past simple question form is **did + subject + infinitive** for all persons. The short answers are **Yes, I did.** / **No, I didn't.**

***Did** the helicopter **land** in the desert? Yes **it did**.*

#### Past continuous: question

The past continuous question form is **was/were + subject + -ing form**. The short answers are **Yes, I was.** / **No, I wasn't.**

How **were you feeling** when it arrived?

### Take note: spelling changes

In the past continuous, all verbs end in **-ing**, but sometimes the spelling changes:

*take – taking hit – hitting die – dying*

### Take note: verbs we don't use in the past continuous

There are some verbs that we don't usually use in the continuous form. They are often verbs related to the senses and thinking, for example: **hear, see, smell, hate, know, understand, believe, notice, want, need, seem, wish.**

**WRONG:** *Were you **knowing** Jess when you were living in Madrid?*

**CORRECT:** *Did you **know** Jess when you were living in Madrid?*

### Spoken English

In the past simple and the past continuous, we usually use a contraction with the negative auxiliary verb:

**didn't** (= did not) **wasn't** (= was not)

We usually say the positive and negative auxiliary verbs quickly and without emphasis. We don't usually pronounce the final 't' in 'didn't', 'wasn't' or 'weren't' in the flow of speech.

*He **wasn't** **looking** when his team scored a goal.*

/hi wɒzn 'lʊkɪŋ wɛn hɪz ti:m skɔ:d ə ɡəʊl/

But when the word following the contraction begins with a vowel sound, we pronounce the final 't':

*They were delayed, so they **didn't** **arrive** on time.*

/ðeɪ wə dɪ'leɪd, səʊ ðeɪ **daɪnt** ə'raɪv ɒn taɪm/

