

Session 2

When telling a story or talking about a true event, we can use both the continuous and simple forms of the past tense. In this session, you will put events from the animated video in order, and then focus on when to use the two forms of the tense.

Activity 2

Learn the language: Past simple and continuous

Past simple and past continuous

We heard Eva talking about the story of what happened to the Titanic. Now let's look at some of the verb forms used to talk about these events in the past.

Look at these sentences:

Captain Smith **was standing** on the deck when Eva **boarded** the ship.
The ship **struck** an iceberg while Eva **was sleeping**.
Eva's father **took** her to the deck and **put** her on a lifeboat.
When the lifeboat **reached** the water, the people on the Titanic **were running** about and starting to panic.
The Titanic **broke** into two pieces and slowly **sank** into the ocean.

These sentences contain examples of past simple and past continuous.

The ship **struck** (past simple) an iceberg while Eva **was sleeping** (past continuous).

When to use past simple

We use the past simple to describe an action that happened and finished in the past. We commonly use it to give the order of events in a narrative.

Examples

The Titanic struck the iceberg at 11.40pm.
It slowly sank into the ocean.

When to use past continuous

We use the past continuous to describe an action that was in progress at a particular time in the past but not completed. We often use this tense with a specific time or together with another shorter event.

Examples

The passengers were having dinner at 9 o'clock.
Captain Smith was standing on the deck.

How to make positive past continuous sentences

The past continuous is made from **subject + was/were + verb-ing**.

Eva was sleeping

See our [grammar reference](#) for more details and examples of these tenses.

To do

There were nearly 1,500 passengers and about 900 crew members on the Titanic when it sank. What were they doing when the accident happened? Put the words in the correct order to make past continuous sentences.

Next

Do you know when to use the past simple and when to use the past continuous? The next activity will test you!

