

Past Continuous

Past Continuous - Introduction

Past continuous expresses an unfinished or incomplete action in the past.

Past continuous is also known as the past progressive.

Verbs that refer to emotions or desires don't usually take the continuous form. (fear, love, hate ...)

Many languages do not have a continuous form.

Past Continuous - Usage

Past continuous is used

- for incomplete actions that happened earlier
- to describe a story's background
- to indicate a change of mind
- to emphasise duration
- for old habits that no longer happen
- in reported speech

Past Continuous - Formation

Positive:

subject + was/were + verb+ing

I was eating ice-cream.

Negative:

subject + was/were + not + verb+ing

We weren't eating ice-cream.

Question:

was/were + subject + verb+ing

Was she eating ice-cream?

Negative question:

was/were not + subject + verb+ing

Wasn't he eating ice-cream?

Past Continuous – Examples #1

for incomplete actions that happened earlier

- I was shopping when you called.
- He was working yesterday evening.

to describe a story's background

- As the sun was setting, he took out the ring and proposed.
- I was having such a lovely dream when the alarm went off.

to indicate a change of mind

- I was going to watch a film but I cleaned the house instead.
- I was going to clean the house but ended up playing on the computer.

Past Continuous – Examples #2

to emphasise duration

- I was working on that new project all weekend.
- They were playing cards all night.

for old habits that no longer happen

- He was always forgetting his keys.
- She was always singing in the shower.

reported speech

- “I am saving to buy a new car” – he said he was saving to buy a new car.
- “We are planning our holiday” – they said they were planning their holiday.