

Past continuous

2º NB Inglés

EOI Sevilla

Form

[was/were + present participle]

Examples: •

You **were studying** when she called. •

Were you **studying** when she called? •

You **were not studying** when she
called. •

USE 1: Interrupted Action in the Past

Use the Past Continuous to indicate that a longer action in the past was interrupted. The interruption is usually a shorter action in the Simple Past. Remember this can be a real interruption or just an interruption in time.

Examples:

I **was watching** TV when she called.

When the phone rang, she **was writing** a letter.

While we **were having** the picnic, it started to rain.

What **were** you **doing** when the earthquake started?

I **was listening** to my iPod, so I didn't hear the fire alarm.

You **were not listening** to me when I told you to turn the oven off.

While John **was sleeping** last night, someone stole his car.

Sammy **was waiting** for us when we got off the plane.

While I **was writing** the email, the computer suddenly went off.

A: What **were** you **doing** when you broke your leg?

B: I **was snowboarding**.

USE 2: Specific Time as an Interruption

You can also use a specific time as an interruption. •

Examples: •

Last night at 6 PM, I **was eating** dinner. •

At midnight, we **were** still **driving** through the desert. •

Yesterday at this time, I **was sitting** at my desk at work. •

IMPORTANT •

In the Simple Past, a specific time is used to show when an action began or finished. In the Past Continuous, a specific time only interrupts the action. •

Examples: •

Last night at 6 PM, I **ate** dinner. •

I started eating at 6 PM.

Last night at 6 PM, I **was eating** dinner. •

I started earlier; and at 6 PM, I was in the process of eating dinner.

USE 3: Parallel Actions

When you use the Past Continuous with two actions in the same sentence, it expresses the idea that both actions were happening at the same time. The actions are parallel.

Examples:

I **was studying** while he **was making** dinner.

While Ellen **was reading**, Tim **was watching** television.

Were you listening while he **was talking**?

I **wasn't paying** attention while I **was writing** the letter, so I made several mistakes.

What **were you doing** while you **were waiting**?

Thomas **wasn't working**, and I **wasn't working** either.

They **were eating** dinner, **discussing** their plans, and **having** a good time.

USE 4: Atmosphere

In English, we often use a series of parallel actions to describe the atmosphere at a particular time in the past. •

Example: •

When I walked into the office, several people **were** busily **typing**, some **were talking** on the phones, the boss **was yelling** directions, and customers **were waiting** to be helped. One customer **was yelling** at a secretary and **waving** his hands. Others **were complaining** to each other about the bad service. •

USE 5: Repetition and Irritation with "Always"

The Past Continuous with words such as "always" or "constantly" expresses the idea that something irritating or shocking often happened in the past. The concept is very similar to the expression "used to" but with negative emotion. Remember to put the words "always" or "constantly" between "be" and "verb+ing."

Examples:

- She **was always coming** to class late.
- He **was constantly talking**. He annoyed everyone.
- I didn't like them because they **were always complaining**.

Non-Continuous Verbs / Mixed Verbs

It is important to remember that Non-Continuous Verbs cannot be used in any continuous tenses. Also, certain non-continuous meanings for Mixed Verbs cannot be used in continuous tenses. Instead of using Past Continuous with these verbs, you must use Simple Past.

Examples:

Jane **was being** at my house when you arrived.

Not Correct

Jane **was** at my house when you arrived. ***Correct***

ADVERB PLACEMENT

The examples below show the placement •
for grammar adverbs such as: always, only,
never, ever, still, just, etc.

Examples: •

You were **just** studying when she called. •

Were you **just** studying when she called? •

EXERCISES AND RELATED TOPICS

- **Exercises on Simple Past and Past Progressive**
- one after another or at the same time: [Exercise 1](#), [Exercise 2](#)
- new or already in progress: [Exercise 3](#), [Exercise 4](#)
- just mentioning or emphasising progress: [Exercise 5](#), [Exercise 6](#)
- mixed exercises: [Exercise 7](#), [Exercise 8](#)