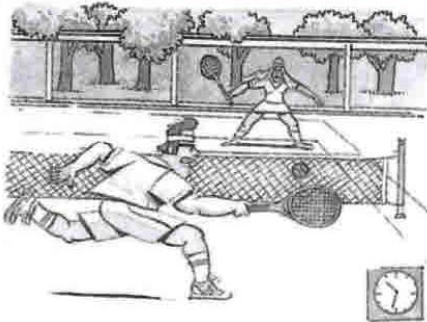


Past Continuous (*I was doing*)

A

Study this example situation:



Yesterday Karen and Jim played tennis. They began at 10:00 and finished at 11:30.

So at 10:30 they were **playing** tennis.

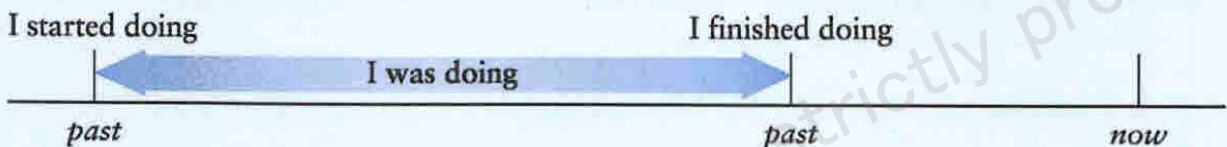
They were playing = they were in the middle of playing. They had not finished playing.

Was/were -ing is the *past continuous*:

I/he/she/it was playing/doing/working, etc.
we/you/they were

B

We use the past continuous to say that somebody was in the middle of doing something at a certain time. The action or situation had already started before this time but had not finished:



- This time last year I was living in Brazil.
- What were you doing at 10:00 last night?
- I waved at her, but she wasn't looking.

C

Compare the *past continuous* (*I was doing*) and *simple past* (*I did*):

Past continuous (in the middle of an action)

- I was walking home when I met Dave. (= in the middle of walking home)
- Nicole was watching TV when the phone rang.

Simple past (complete action)

- I walked home after the party last night. (= all the way, completely)
- Nicole watched TV a lot when she was sick last year.

D

We often use the simple past and the past continuous together to say that something happened in the middle of something else:

- Matt burned his hand while he was cooking dinner.
- I saw you in the park yesterday. You were sitting on the grass and reading a book.
- While I was working in the garden, I hurt my back.

But we use the simple past to say that one thing happened after another:

- I was walking downtown when I saw Dave. So I stopped and we talked for a while.

Compare:

- When Beth arrived, we were having dinner. (= We had already started dinner.)
- When Beth arrived, we had dinner. (= Beth arrived and then we had dinner.)

E

Some verbs (for example, know and want) are not normally used in the continuous (see Unit 4A):

- We were good friends. We knew each other well. (*not* We were knowing)
- I was enjoying the party, but Chris wanted to go home. (*not* was wanting)

Exercises

6.1 What were you doing at the following times? Write one sentence as in the examples. The past continuous is not always necessary (see sentence 2).

- (at 8:00 last night) I was having dinner with some friends.
- (at 5:00 last Monday) I was on a bus on my way to class.
- (at 10:15 yesterday morning) _____
- (at 7:45 last night) _____
- (half an hour ago) _____

6.2 Use your own ideas to complete these sentences. Use the past continuous.

- Matt burned his hand while he was cooking dinner.
- The doorbell rang while I _____.
- We saw an accident while we _____.
- Lauren fell asleep while she _____.
- The television was on, but nobody _____.

6.3 Put the verbs into the correct form, past continuous or simple past.



I saw (see) Sue downtown yesterday, but she _____ (not / see) me. She _____ (look) the other way.



I _____ (meet) Tom and Ann at the airport a few weeks ago. They _____ (go) to Boston and I _____ (go) to Montreal. We _____ (talk) while we _____ (wait) for our flights.



I _____ (ride) my bicycle yesterday when suddenly a man _____ (step) out into the street in front of me. I _____ (go) fairly fast, but luckily I _____ (manage) to stop in time and _____ (not / hit) him.

6.4 Put the verbs into the correct form, past continuous or simple past.

- Jane was waiting (wait) for me when I arrived (arrive).
- "What _____ (you / do) at this time yesterday?" "I was asleep."
- "_____ (you / go) out last night?" "No, I was too tired."
- How fast _____ (you / drive) when the accident _____ (happen)?
- John _____ (take) a picture of me while I _____ (not / look).
- We were in a very difficult position. We _____ (not / know) what to do.
- I haven't seen David for ages. The last time I _____ (see) him, he _____ (try) to find a job in Miami.
- I _____ (walk) along the street when suddenly I _____ (hear) footsteps behind me. Somebody _____ (follow) me. I was scared, and I _____ (start) to run.
- When I was young, I _____ (want) to be a pilot.