

USE THE PAST CONTINUOUS

We can use the past continuous tense in the following cases:

1. Actions in progress in the past

We use the past continuous to talk about an action which was in progress in the past at a specified time.

We often use **all** to emphasize continuity: *all night, all day, all evening*, etc.

- *We were watching movies all night.*
- *I was working all day.*
- *She was living in Paris in 1998.*

2. Actions happening at the same time

We use the past continuous to express that two or more actions were in progress at the same time.

We often use **while**.

- *While Peter was playing on the computer, Julie was reading a book.*
- *Jack was jogging and Peter was weightlifting.*
- *I was writing emails while the cake was baking in the oven.*

3. Actions interrupted by another action

We use the past continuous to express that an action in progress was interrupted by another action. We use the past simple for the action which interrupts.

We often use the following words: **when, as, just as, while**.

- *We were having dinner when the phone rang.*
- *While I was walking home, I met Fred.*
- *Just as she was leaving the office, the boss turned up.*

4. Repeated past actions

We use the past continuous to talk about repeated past actions.

We often use **always, all the time, constantly** and **continually** to express criticism.

- *When she was young, she was always playing music at night.*
- *He was talking all the time.*
- *Jack was always wearing a scarf.*

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5. Unfulfilled plans

We use the past continuous to talk about unfulfilled plans.

We use *plan, hope, want, intend, to be going to*, etc.

- *I **was hoping to** meet my friends at the weekend, but they were too busy.*
- *She **was planning to** go on holiday, but she didn't have money.*
- *Peter **was wanting to** phone his mom, but he didn't have time.*

6. Polite questions

We can use the past continuous for polite questions.

- *I **was wondering** if you could help me.*
- *I **was thinking** that you might be able to help me.*
- *I **was hoping** you could do something for me.*

7. Background information

We can use the past continuous to give background information.

- *It **was getting dark** and she was preparing dinner.*
- *We were walking in town when the sun **was setting**.*
- *Peter was going home and the sun **was shining**.*

Negative Statements in Past Continuous Tense

Negative statements in the past continuous tense describe actions that were not happening at specific moments in the past. It's important to know the structure of these sentences to use them correctly.

Structure of Negative Sentences

To make negative statements in the past continuous tense, use the formula: **subject + was/were + not + verb (-ing)**.

Examples:

- *He **was not watching** TV.*
- *They **were not playing** outside.*

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In these examples, “was” or “were” gets a “not” right after, and the main verb uses the -ing form. This provides clarity about what was not happening at a given time.

Interrogative Form of Past Continuous Tense

In the past continuous tense, questions can be formed to find out what someone was doing at a specific time in the past. These questions can either be yes-no questions or wh-questions.

Yes-No Questions

Yes-no questions in the past continuous tense are used to confirm details about actions that were ongoing in the past. To form these questions, **swap the subject and the auxiliary verb “was” or “were”**.

- *Structure: Was/Were + subject + verb(-ing)?*
- *Example: Was she reading a book?*

In the example, “Was” is the auxiliary verb, “she” is the subject, and “reading” is the main verb in the -ing form. A yes-no question expects a simple “yes” or “no” response. These questions are typically used to check if something was happening during a certain time.

Wh-Questions

Wh-questions in the past continuous tense ask for specific information about ongoing actions or events in the past. These begin with question words like “**what,**” “**where,**” “**why,**” “**when,**” “**who,**” or “**how**”.

- *Structure: Question word + was/were + subject + verb(-ing)?*
- *Example: What were they doing at 8 PM yesterday?*

Here, “What” is the question word, “were” is the auxiliary verb, “they” is the subject, and “doing” is the main verb in the -ing form. Wh-questions require more detailed answers and provide more information about the action that was happening.

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PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

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Form	Affirmative	S + was/were + V-ing She was cooking all the morning.
	Negative	S + was/were + not + V-ing She was not sleeping when he came home.
	Interrogative	Was/were + S + V-ing Was she sleeping when he came home?

Usage	Example	Time Expressions
Interrupted action in the past.	They were waiting for the train when I spoke to them.	When
Parallel actions	I was studying when my mother was watching TV.	While
Story background	While I was driving to work yesterday...	Constantly
Past habit	I was always cooking when I got home from school.	At that time
Specific time as an interruption.	Last night at 6 p.m, I was eating dinner.	In those days
Emphasis of length of action	I was working in the garden all day.	All morning
Arrangement in the past.	I was upset because I was leaving there that morning.	For hours
A series of parallel actions	When I came to school, the school bell was ringing, many students were running towards the garden, teachers were going out from classrooms.	Always ...

Reference:

Redaction from ProfEnglish. (s.f.) The past continuous. Professional English.

Recovered from: <https://www.profenglish.eu/the-past-continuous/>