2025/12/05 15:01 1/4 The past continuous

The past continuous

Introduction



She was playing outside when it started to rain.

Construction

Subject + past simple of 'to be' + the present participle of another verb - I was going.

Affirmative	Negative 1	Negative 2	Interrogative
I was working You were working He was working She was working It was working We were working They were working	I was not working You were not working He was not working She was not working It was not working We were not working They were not working	I wasn't working You weren't working He wasn't working She wasn't working It wasn't working We weren't working They weren't working	Was I working? Were you working? Was he working? Was she working? Was it working? Were we working? Were they working?

Uses

	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
Uses	Examples
0363	Examples

To talk about something that was happening at a specific time or date. We do not know when the action started or finished and this is not important.	I was studying the past continuous at ten o'clock last night. It was raining all day yesterday. We were living in New Orleans in the 1980s.
To talk about something that happened during a specific period that we mention. The action fills the specified period.	What were you doing between 6.30 and 8 o'clock last Saturday evening? I was working in Japan from 1972 to 1984. They were playing football for most of the morning.
To talk about temporary situations in the past.	He was working in London last year but he's back in Paris now. Were you living in a hotel whilst working in London? I was feeding Jane's cats whilst she was on holiday.
When something else happens in the time period of the past continuous action.	I was leaving when the telephone rang. Our dog found a bone when he was digging in the garden. What was she doing when you saw her?
When two continuous actions were happening at the same time.	I was watching the television whilst Susan was cooking. What were you doing while John was painting the door? It wasn't raining when I was hanging out the washing.

2025/12/05 15:01 3/4 The past continuous

I was thinking I might go for a walk With verbs of reflection and wishing in present situations and polite conversation. I was wondering if you would mind helping me with this suitcase. I was hoping that Sheila would visit this weekend. Abbreviated 'was going to', He was taking me to a restaurant particularly with verbs describing tonight but now he has to work late. motion. [Informal] We were meeting at 10 o'clock but now it has been postponed. For past habits with words like always, Our previous temp was always having constantly and forever. Normally these problems with his PC. sentences show disapproval. My last boyfriend was constantly cancelling at the last minute. The children were forever playing on their 'gameboys'. When explaining or asking for an What were you doing with my new explanation of a current or recent computer? I was only borrowing it for action, particularly if the action is seen a minute. as wrong. Why were you looking in my desk drawer? I was searching for the key to the filing cabinet.

For verbs that are not normally used in the continuous tense, please see the rules for stative verbs.

In English, there is often more than one way to say something. In certain cases, the use of the past simple past in the above examples is also grammatically correct. For example the sentence:

I was watching the television whilst Susan was cooking.

can also be expressed as:

I watched the television whilst Susan cooked.

Examples



He was speaking on his mobile when the train arrived.



The bags split when I was coming home from the supermarket.



He was admiring a painting when I saw him.



What were you doing between the hours of sunset and sunrise on the 28th September?



What were you doing with that biscuit? Well I was thinking of eating it.

https://tools.e-exercises.com/ - Ressources pour les apprenants

https://tools.e-exercises.com/doku.php?id=en:grammar:past:the_past_continuous&rev=1475153090

Last update: 2023/02/14 14:21

