

The present continuous:further information

Adverbs of frequency

Although we usually use the present simple with **adverbs of frequency**, it is possible to use **always** and words with a similar meaning with the present continuous. The present simple focuses on how regularly something happens and the present continuous emphasises that it happens a lot. It is a way of exaggerating 'very often'. Compare:

She always smiles when she greets a client. [every time that she greets a client]
She's always smiling. [she smiles a lot; not all the time of course]

We can use it when we think something happens too often or we are unhappy about something:

I'm always losing my keys!
You're always talking on the phone when you should be working!
He's constantly playing with his pen during meetings!
She's forever talking about her children - it's so boring!



My neighbour's always popping in for a coffee, which is nice.



My children are always fighting; what shall I do?

Stative and active verbs

We usually avoid using the present continuous (and other continuous tenses) with stative verbs. These are different from active verbs because they describe a state, feelings or emotions. They are also used to refer to the senses or to talk about weights and measurements etc.

I know a lot of Japanese people. [not 'I'm knowing']

He believes in God. [not 'He's believing']

I'm a teacher. [not 'I'm being']

It weighs 3kg. [not 'It's weighing']

However, there are exceptions. See **stative and active verbs** for more detail.

The senses

Verbs like **taste, see, hear, smell, sound** etc. are more commonly used with **simple tenses**:

It tastes delicious.

It smells good.

It sounds lovely.

It feels soft.

It looks wonderful.

However we can also use the continuous when talking about current situations:

You look nice today. = You're looking nice today

Do you feel better today? = Are you feeling better today?

The garden is looking lovely now that spring is here.

It is feeling much softer now I have washed it with Lenor.

Stories and jokes

In informal, spoken English, we sometimes use the **present simple** and **present continuous** to tell a joke or relate something that happened in the past because it sounds more interesting or dramatic:



You won't believe what happened last night! Well, I'm cooking the dinner when his car screeches to a halt and I stop what I'm doing. He comes in and he's holding a bunch of flowers. Well, I know what he's thinking...



A dog walks into a bar and he's wearing a suit and tie. He's carrying a briefcase and he says to the barman...

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