

Past Simple vs Past Continuous

Studying Form - Presentation

Start by teaching statement forms, and work your way up from there. From statements to yes/no questions, there is only inversion of the subject and have/has. From yes/no questions to information questions, there is only the addition of a question word.

Past Continuous Statements

Subject	Was/Were	Present Participle (Verb + ing)
You / We / They	were	going, doing, seeing, eating, drinking, falling, walking, watching, etc.
I / He / She / It	was	

Past Simple Statements

Subject	Regular Verb or...	Irregular Verb
I / You / We / They / He / She / It	learned, walked, hiccupped, cried, waited, bathed, etc.	see, be, go, do, fight, draw, drink, eat, fall, grow, etc.

Past Continuous Yes/No Questions

Was/Were	Subject	Present Participle (Verb + ing)
Were	you / we / they	going, doing, seeing, eating, drinking, falling, walking, watching, etc.
Was	I / he / she / it	

Past Simple Yes/No Questions

Do / Be	Subject	Main Verb in Base Form
Did	I / you / we / they / he / she / it	learn, see, fall, eat, cry, wait, grow, etc.
Was	I / he / she / it	-----
Were	you / we / they	-----

Past Continuous Information (Wh-) Questions

Question Word	Was/Were	Subject	Present Participle (Verb + ing)
Who Where What When Why How	were	you / we / they	going, doing, seeing, eating, drinking, falling, walking, watching, etc.
	was	I / he / she / it	

**Note – If the question is about the subject – that is, if the subject is unknown – use “who” or “what” as the question word and omit the subject. No other changes must be made.*

Past Simple Information (Wh-) Questions

Question Word	Do / Be	Subject	Main Verb in Base Form
Who Where What When Why How	did	I / you / we / they / he / she / it	learn, see, fall, eat, cry, wait, grow, etc.
	was	I / he / she / it	-----
	were	you / we / they	-----

Studying Form - Practice

Fill in the blanks in the following sentences with the **Past Continuous** form of the verb in parentheses.

- Sally _____ (play) tennis at 4:00 yesterday afternoon.
- Phil _____ (drink) a cup of coffee when the phone rang.
- Mallory _____ (talk) to her boyfriend when her roommate walked in.
- Was Howie _____ (live) in Chicago at the time of the Great Chicago Fire?
- Susan _____ (work) for two different community colleges, but she quit when one of them offered her a full-time job.
- Will _____ (date) Julie when he realized that he liked Beth more.
- _____ Callie really _____ (talk) to ghosts yesterday afternoon?

8. Our friends _____ (get) married when the tornado hit.
9. _____ you _____ (eat) alligator when I saw you yesterday?
10. Why _____ they _____ (leave) the party when I arrived?

Fill in the blanks in the following sentences with the **Past Simple** form of the verb in parentheses.

1. Sally _____ (win) four tennis championships last year.
2. Phil _____ (drink) coffee all afternoon, so now it's 11:30 pm, and he can't sleep.
3. Mallory _____ (date) her last boyfriend for a week.
4. How long _____ Howie _____ (live) in Chicago before he moved to New York?
5. Susan _____ (work) for Trident Community College for seven months, and now she works for Wake Technical Community College.
6. Will _____ (write) love letters to Beth for one year, and then she agreed to go out with him.
7. Callie _____ (communicate) with ghosts for the last few years of her life.
8. Our friends _____ (fight) all the time. That's probably why they broke up.
9. _____ you _____ (eat) my pizza? I can't find it in the refrigerator.
10. Where _____ you _____ (go) every night last week?

Put the words in the following sentences in the correct order.

1. was / I / when you called. / eating / doughnuts
2. the violin / Lauren / for several years. / played
3. at noon? / Why / you / just arriving to work / were
4. she / cry / Did / when you told her?
5. very hard / Alex / worked / last week.
6. Patricia / her husband / six / babysitting / children / was / while / playing golf. / was
7. emails / answering / I / at 9:00 this morning. / was
8. write emails / you / all morning? / Did (It is now afternoon.)
9. did / What / John / work on yesterday?
10. worked / on the car / John / yesterday.

Analyzing Verb Tenses

Look at each of the sentences in the Practice section. Answer the following questions:

- Which verb tense comes with a time clause that explains a precise moment in the past?
- Which verb tense comes with a time clause that explains a time span in the past?
- Which words/phrases indicate a precise moment?
- Which words/phrases indicate a time span?
- Which verb tense indicates that an activity took longer than just one moment?

- Which verbs were never used in the Past Continuous tense? Why not?
- Which verb tense is used to show an interruption?
- Which verb tense is used for the action that was interrupted?

Answers:

- Past Continuous
- Past Simple
- At, when, while
- Yesterday, last week/month/year, in (a year/month that is finished), this morning/afternoon/evening (if it is later than the time given), ago
- Past Continuous
- Stative verbs - be, have, believe, like. Stative verbs are not usually used in continuous tenses. Only active verbs are used in continuous tenses.
- Past Simple
- Past Continuous

Choosing Your Weapon - Controlled Practice

Fill in the blanks in the following sentences with either the **Past Continuous** or **Past Simple** form of the verb in parentheses. When you're deciding which one to use, ask yourself:

- Is the verb active or stative? Active verbs can be used in either form. Stative verbs can only be used in Past Simple, NOT in Past Continuous.
- Does the sentence give a precise moment or a time span in the past? Past Continuous verbs usually occur at a precise moment. Past Simple verbs usually occur within a time span. However, if we want to indicate that an action continued for longer than just a moment, we may use Past Continuous, often with the words "as" or "during."
- Does one action interrupt another? Usually, the verb in progress is a Past Continuous verb, and the verb that interrupts the action is a Past Simple verb.

1. They just _____ (wash) the car yesterday, but then it _____ (rain), so the car _____ (get) muddy.
2. The twins _____ (play) nicely together yesterday when I came home.
3. What _____ you _____ (do) last week? when I _____ (call) you?
4. I'm sorry that I _____ (not/be) available last week. I _____ (work) on a difficult project, and I _____ (not/have) time to talk to anybody!
5. Zeke _____ (paint) graffiti on the governor's house last night when the police _____ (arrive) and _____ (arrest) him.

Editing - Practice

Find and correct the mistakes in the following sentences. If a sentence is correct, write "correct."

1. Adam was watched two movies yesterday.
2. Corrie saw several falling stars last night.
3. Stella were listening to music at 8:00 last Tuesday evening.
4. Victor ran a marathon while his wife was had a baby.
5. Did Hank and Patricia bought their first house last month?
6. Christina and Max did paint the house last week.
7. Jasmine was writing a poem when her dog throwed up.
8. Who wrote this poem?
9. It was rained on Tuesday when I drove to work.
10. What was making it that noise?

Producing Language

Finish the following sentences:

1. I was washing the dishes when...
2. I ... for hours last week.
3. I ... a lot when I was a child.
4. I was ... while the teacher was talking.
5. Last Tuesday night, as Phillip was cleaning up after dinner, his wife...
6. Recently, I was talking to a friend about _____, and he said, "..."
7. I spoke to ... on the phone last week.
8. Yesterday, I...
9. Randy was ... when the doorbell rang.
10. I didn't ... yesterday, but I plan to do it today.

Write the questions that were asked before the answers given.

1. Q:
A: She read a book about dinosaurs.
2. Q:
A: They were eating at a Mexican restaurant.
3. Q:
A: He visited Rome at least five times last year.
4. Q:
A: We went there on vacation every year when I was a child.
5. Q:
A: I was playing basketball.