**Past Continuous Vs. Past Simple**

**Past Continuous Tense:**

The past continuous (also called past **progressive**) is a [verb tense](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/verbtenseintro.html) which is used to show that an **ongoing past action was happening at a specific moment of interruption**, or that **two ongoing actions were happening at the same time**.

* Example : They were playing outside when the rain fell.

Here the action was still going on and continued (They were still playing) when something else happened at the same time (when the rain fell), but all actions took place in the past.

* Example: I discovered wave energy when I was doing my PhD at Edinburg University.

**keywords: as/ when/ while**

* Example: when/ while I was studying at university, I became interested in alternative energy.

**Note**: **When** can introduce two past simple actions to describe an immediate consequence of an action

Example: When the computer activated the yaw motor, the rotor turned against the wind.

* **As/ while** are used to describe two actions that happen simultaneously
* Example: As the generator was turning, the turbine broke down
* While I was sleeping, he came.
* As she was cooking, they arrived.

**Note: we can’t use the past continuous with stative verbs**

## Past Continuous Forms

**positive**:

singular subject (I, he, she, it)+was+ verb+ing

plural subject (you, we, they)+were+verb+ing

ex: Wave energy **was causing** several problems

ex: : You **were studying** when she called.

she **was talking** when the telephone rang.:

* Jack [**was telling**](https://dspace.qou.edu/contents/0113/unit3/index.html)a story when suddenly we heard a sound.
* The students [**were singing**](https://dspace.qou.edu/contents/0113/unit3/index.html)when their friend arrived.
* While he [**was taking**](https://dspace.qou.edu/contents/0113/unit3/index.html)a bath, the light went out.
* The teacher walked into the room while we [**were talking**](https://dspace.qou.edu/contents/0113/unit3/index.html).

Note: Now, why do we use the past continuous verbs here: **was telling**/ **were singing**/ **was taking** and **were talking**? Because they are all a little bit long actions that were happening and continued at a certain time in the past.

The past simple verbs: **heard**/ **arrived**/ **went** and **walked** are all shorter actions if compared with the previous longer ones.

**negative:**

(I, he, she, it)+wasn't+ verb+ing

(you, we, they)+weren't +verb+ing

Ex: the generator **wasn’t running** very smoothly.

ex: my father **wasn't waiting** for me when I got there

they **weren't watching** TV when I got home

**past continuous questions:**

- we make past continuous questions with: **question word+ was or were+ subject+ verb+ing**

**Example**: What equipment was the controller using?

**Simple Past:**

We use the past simple to talk about a completed action, or a series of completed actions in the past.

**Note**: when two actions happened at the same time or there was no long time between them we use the simple past in the two actions

Example: The rotor **turned** against the wind and **started** the turbine.

* We **did** a quick Google search on sea snakes and **found** Pelamis
* He **came** and **gave** me a book

**Note**: We normally use the past simple, not the past continuous, to describe states and actions which take very little time.

Example: and we **liked** that

* I **saw** that people were doing something really important.
* The accident **happened** suddenly

**Exercise 1 (page 14)**

1. When they **were digging** under London, part of the tunnel **collapsed**.
2. Rutherford **was working** in Manchester when he **split** the atom.
3. The earthquake **happened** late at night while most people **were** **sleeping**
4. As it **was coming** to land, the aircraft **crashed**.
5. When Richard **was studying**, he **met** Professor Salter.
6. When they **were constructing** the bridge, they **had** to alter the design.

**Exercise 2 (page 14)**

1. We **did** a Google search and **found** the answer very quickly.
2. When he **was working** in Nigeria, there **was** a serious accident on the oil rig.
3. When Travor Baylis **heard** of about communication problems in Africa, he **decided** to build a radio without batteries.
4. While the operation **was going on** in France, doctors in other countries **were able** to assist using telesurgery.
5. The police **used** a Taser gun because they **thought** the suspect might hurt someone.
6. He **wasn’t wearing** a hard hat when the accident **happened**, so he hurt his head.
7. The motor **was running** when he **removed** the guards. It was a stupid thing to do.
8. The accident **was** his own fault. He **was using** a grinder without wearing eye protection when it **happened**.
9. While the generator **was running**, a fault **developed** in the main bearing.
10. As they **were building** the wind farm, protestors **damaged** some equipment.