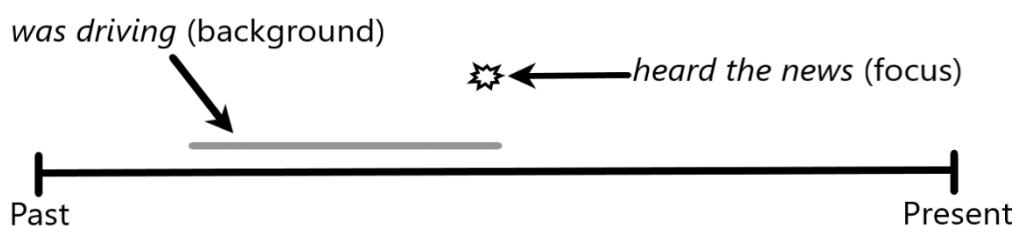


Past Continuous vs Past Simple

Past continuous is often used to give background information about a past event before describing the event itself. This is why past continuous is often called a “storytelling tense.” It can help set the background of a story. The structure is: was/were + verb + ing.

Eg. *I **was driving** when I heard the news*

Note that “was driving” is in the past continuous, but “heard” is in the past simple, showing it is the event to be focused on.



For they/we/you statements, “were” is used instead of “was.”

Eg. *They **were driving** to school when they ran out of petrol.*



1. Complete the sentences below with past continuous.

- I **was cleaning** (clean) my house when the doorbell rang.
- You **were sleeping** (sleep) while I did all the work!
- Why **was** he **talking** (talk) so loudly?
- I met my new colleagues while my boss **was giving** (give) me a tour of the company.
- My parents **were watching** (watch) the movie when I fell asleep.
- I **was speeding** (speed) when the police pulled me over.



2. Complete the sentences below with past simple and past continuous. Each sentence should use past simple once and past continuous once.

- I **was cooking** (cook) when my girlfriend **got** (get) home.
- We **were leaving** (leave) work when our boss **called** (call) us back
- She **interrupted** (interrupt) me while I **was talking** (talk).
- He **wasn't paying** (not/pay) attention, so he **made** (make) a lot of mistakes.

- e) The audience **was waiting** (wait) outside when they **announced** (announce) the show was cancelled.
- f) Greg **found** (find) his girlfriend, she **was sitting** (sit) outside the pub.
- g) I **lost** (lose) my wallet while I was **wrestling** (wrestle) my brother.
- h) I **was looking** (look) through some old files when I **found** (find) the mistake.
- i) I **was trying** (try) to send him a message when my battery **ran out** (run out).

Past continuous is also used to talk about an action that was in progress *at a specific time*.
 Eg. *At 9pm last night I was talking on the phone with my wife.*



3. Ask your partner what they were doing at the following times.

What were you doing...

- a) at 2pm yesterday? *E.g. I was eating lunch at 2pm yesterday*
- b) 10 years ago?
- c) yesterday evening?
- d) last Sunday at 8am?
- e) 8 months ago?



4. Read four people telling stories about “close encounters” with animals and choose between past simple and past continuous.



Caleb Minchin: “I grew up in Australia so snakes are nothing new, but when I was a teenager I **came** (come) very close to being bitten. I **was walking** (walk) on a path in the bush when I came (come) across a fallen tree. I stepped (step) on the tree and **jumped** (jump) off. As I was **coming** (come) down, I **looked** (look) down and saw (see) a brown snake all curled up. I think it **was sleeping** (sleep), because usually snakes avoid people. My foot **landed** (land) directly on it, but I managed to jump away just as it tried to bite me. I **was shaking** (shake) for hours afterwards.

Tammy Dubious: "I **was making** (make) dinner one night when I **noticed** (notice) my dogs waiting at the door. Usually that means they want to be let out, but that night they **were acting** (act) differently, they **seemed** (seem) nervous. I went (go) to the door and **looked** (look) outside. A huge black bear was standing (stand) there, holding a bag of marshmallows. He was only a few feet away, calmly watching us through the glass."



Ben Rollins: "This story is quite embarrassing. An elk **attacked** (attack) me while I **was taking** (take) a photo of it. Some friends and I **were hiking** (hike) in the woods when we **spotted** (spot) a herd of elk. There were signs around the forest saying not to get too close, but they **seemed** (seem) so peaceful. I **walked** (walk) up to them, and as I **was trying** (try) to take the photo, the male **turned** (turn) towards me. He **charged** (charge) me and **hit** (hit) me as I **was turning** (turn) to run. I **needed** (need) 10 stitches on my shoulder. I got a great photo though."



Mel Rawley: "Last year my sister and I **went** (go) to Canada for holiday. One day while we **were walking** (walk) in a park we **came** (come) across a flock of geese. Where we live geese are pretty friendly, but apparently Canadian geese are notorious for being aggressive. Well my sister **didn't know** (not/know) that, so she **thought** (think) it would be funny to run towards the geese waving her hands and yelling. That was a bad idea. The geese all attacked us, and while we **were trying** (try) to get away I **fell** (fall) over and **broke** (break) my arm. I hate Canadian geese now."

 5. Think of your own story about an animal, prepare a few sentences that include past continuous, and tell your partner.

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