

The simple aspect

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- 1 The simple aspect describes an action that is seen to be complete. The action is viewed as a whole unit.
The sun rises in the east. (= all time)
When I've read the book, I'll lend it to you. (= complete)
She has red hair. (= permanent)
He always wore a suit. (= a habit)
It rained every day of our holiday. (= the whole two weeks)
This shop will close at 7.00 this evening. (= a fact)
- 2 Remember the verbs that rarely take the continuous. This is because they express states that are seen to be permanent and not subject to frequent change.

Verbs of the mind	know	understand	believe	think	mean
Verbs of emotions	love	hate	like	prefer	care
Verbs of possession	have	own	belong		
Certain other verbs	cost	need	contain	depend	

- 3 The simple aspect expresses a completed action. For this reason we must use the simple, not the continuous, if the sentence contains a number that refers to 'things done'.
She's written three letters this morning.
I drink ten cups of tea a day.
He read five books while he was on holiday.
Simple tenses are dealt with further in Units 2, 3, and 5.

The continuous aspect

- 1 The continuous aspect focuses on the duration of an activity. We are aware of the passing of time between the beginning and the end of the activity. The activity is not permanent.
I'm staying with friends until I find a flat. (= temporary)
What are you doing on your hands and knees? (= in progress)
I've been learning English for years. (And I still am.)
Don't phone at 8.00. We'll be eating. (= in progress)
 - 2 Because the activity is seen in progress, it can be interrupted.
We were walking across a field when we were attacked by a bull.
'Am I disturbing you?' 'No. I'm just doing the ironing.'
 - 3 The activity may not be complete.
I was writing a report on the flight home. (I didn't finish it.)
He was drowning, but we saved him. (He didn't die.)
Who's been eating my chocolates? (There are some left.)
 - 4 The action of some verbs, by definition, lasts a long time, for example, *live, work, play*. The continuous gives these actions limited duration and makes them temporary.
Hans is living in London while he's learning English.
I'm working as a waiter until I go to university.
Murray has been playing well recently. Maybe he'll win Wimbledon.
 - 5 The action of some other verbs lasts a short time, for example, *lose, break, cut, hit, crash*. They are often found in the simple.
I lost all my money. *I've crashed your car. Sorry.*
She's cut her finger. *He hit me.*
- In the continuous, the action of these verbs seems longer or habitual.
I've been cutting the grass. (= for hours)
He was hitting me. (= again and again)