Note: In some sentences either the simple past or past continuous is possible. The speaker will choose the simple past to indicate that the action started and finished. If the action started and continued for a period of time, the speaker will use the past continuous. With the past continuous, the speaker wants to emphasize the duration of an action. The speaker wants the listener to feel the continuing nature of an action in progress.

Note: The choice between the simple past and the past continuous depends on the meaning of a sentence. Compare:

When I got up this morning, my roommate prepared breakfast. (He waited for me to get up.)

When I got up this morning, my roommate was preparing breakfast. (He started before I got up.)

**Simple Past**

1. The simple past is used to describe actions of short duration in the past.

*Alan talked to his boss about the problem.*

*I met Dr. Dance yesterday, and we talked for a few minutes.*

**Past Continuous**

1. With a point in time, the past continuous expresses an action that began before the time given and probably continued after it. The exact beginning and end of the action are unknown.

*Alan was talking to his boss when I walked in.*

*At 12:30 we were eating lunch in the park.*