

The Past Continuous Tense/ زمن الماضي المستمر

(Also called the Past Progressive Tense)

1. What is the Past Continuous Tense?

The Past Continuous tense is used to talk about **actions or situations that were in progress at a specific time in the past**. It focuses on the **duration** or the **middle** of an action, rather than its completion.

Think of it as a **camera rolling** in the past. It shows us what was happening *during* a particular moment or period.

2. How to Form the Past Continuous

The structure is simple and follows this formula:

Subject + was/were + verb(-ing)

- **Was** is used with: *I, He, She, It* (singular subjects)
- **Were** is used with: *You, We, They* (plural subjects)

Affirmative (Positive) Form:

Subject	Auxiliary Verb	Main Verb (-ing)
I	was	working
You	were	sleeping
He	was	reading
She	was	cooking
It	was	raining
We	were	playing
They	were	talking

Examples:

- I **was watching** TV at 8 PM.

- They **were studying** all morning.

Negative Form:

To make it negative, simply add "**not**" after *was* or *were*.

Subject + was/were + not + verb(-ing)

Contractions:

- was not = **wasnt**
- were not = **werent**

Subject	Negative Auxiliary	Main Verb (-ing)
I	was not (wasnt)	sleeping
You	were not (werent)	working
He	was not (wasnt)	listening

Examples:

- She **wasnt listening** to the teacher.
- We **werent driving** fast.

Question Form:

To make a question, invert the subject and the auxiliary verb (*was/were*).

Was/Were + subject + verb(-ing)?

Auxiliary Verb	Subject	Main Verb (-ing)	Question Mark
Was	he	sleeping	?
Were	they	playing	?
Were	you	working	?

Examples:

- **Was** she **wearing** a red dress?

- Were they **arguing** again?
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3. When Do We Use the Past Continuous?

Use 1: Actions in Progress at a Specific Past Time

We use it to say that an action was happening at a particular moment in the past. The action started *before* that moment and continued *after* it.

- At 7 AM, I **was having** breakfast.
 - What **were** you **doing** at midnight?
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Use 2: Interrupted Actions (The "While" / "When" Rule)

This is the most common use. We use the Past Continuous for the **longer action** that is interrupted by a **shorter action** (which is in the **Past Simple**).

- **While** I **was walking** home, I **saw** an accident.
(Walking = longer action; Saw = short interruption)
 - He **was cooking** dinner **when** the phone **rang**.
(Cooking = longer action; Rang = short interruption)
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Use 3: Parallel Actions (Two Actions Happening at the Same Time)

We use it to describe two or more actions that were happening **simultaneously** in the past.

- While I **was reading**, my brother **was watching** TV.
 - The children **were playing** outside while their parents **were talking** inside.
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Use 4: To Set the Atmosphere / Background Description

We use the Past Continuous to describe the background scene or atmosphere in a story.

- The sun **was shining**, the birds **were singing**, and people **were walking** in the park. It was a beautiful day.
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Use 5: Temporary Past Habits or Repeated Actions (Annoying)

We can use it (often with "always" or "constantly") to describe habits that were repeated in the past, especially annoying ones. (Like "used to" but more emotional).

- He **was always losing** his keys.

- She **was constantly complaining** about the food.
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4. Time Expressions Commonly Used

These words often appear with the Past Continuous:

Expression	Example
While	While I was sleeping, the doorbell rang.
When	She was driving when she saw the stop sign.
At 5 PM / At that time	We were having dinner at 8 PM.
All day / All morning	They were working all day yesterday.
As	As she was leaving, the phone rang.
At the moment	I was thinking about you at that moment.

5. Important Rules & Exceptions

Rule 1: Non-Continuous (Stative) Verbs

Some verbs describe states, feelings, or thoughts, not actions. These verbs **cannot** be used in the continuous form.

Common stative verbs:

- *like, love, hate, want, need*
- *believe, know, understand, remember*
- *seem, appear, own, have (meaning possess)*

Incorrect: I **was knowing** the answer.

Correct: I **knew** the answer.

Incorrect: She **was wanting** a new car.

Correct: She **wanted** a new car.

Rule 2: Emphasis on Duration, Not Completion

The Past Continuous emphasizes that an action took time. The Past Simple emphasizes that it was completed.

- **Past Continuous:** I **was reading** a book. (*I spent time on it, but we don't know if I finished.*)
 - **Past Simple:** I **read** a book. (*I finished it.*)
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6. Difference Between Past Simple & Past Continuous

Past Simple (Completed Action)

I **watched** a movie yesterday. (Finished)

He **cooked** dinner. (He finished it)

She **woke up** at 7 AM. (One short action)

Past Continuous (Ongoing Action)

I **was watching** a movie when you called. (Interrupted)

He **was cooking** dinner all evening. (Process)

She **was waking up** when the alarm rang. (Process interrupted)

7. Summary Table

Aspect	Details
Formation	Subject + was/were + verb(-ing)
Use	Ongoing action at a past time, interrupted actions, parallel actions, atmosphere
Signal Words	while, when, at 8 PM, all day, as
Cannot use with	Stative verbs (know, want, like, believe, etc.)
Negative	was/were + not + verb(-ing)
Questions	Was/Were + subject + verb(-ing)?

8. Final Example Paragraph

*Yesterday at 7 AM, I **was getting** ready for work. While I **was brushing** my teeth, my wife **was making** breakfast. The sun **was shining** and the birds **were singing** outside. Suddenly, my phone **rang**. It **was** my boss. He **was calling** to tell me about an important meeting. At that moment, I **was not feeling** very excited about the day, but I knew I had to go.*