

PAST SIMPLE OR PAST CONTINUOUS

A2 | Teens / Adults | Grammar Practice | 35-45 minutes

Learn and practise | Describe a past event and what was happening around it.

1. READ: A surprise at the station

Read the conversation. Notice the bold past simple and past continuous forms.

Amy: How was your trip yesterday?

Dan: Funny, actually. I **was waiting** for my train when I **saw** my old teacher.

Amy: Really? What **was** she **doing** there?

Dan: She **was buying** a ticket. I **called** her name, but she didn't hear me.

Amy: So did you get a chance to talk?

Dan: Yes. While we **were chatting**, my train **arrived**. We exchanged numbers.

2. GRAMMAR: Background and events

Use the past continuous for an action in progress; use the past simple for a completed event.

Use	Pattern	Example
Action in progress	was / were + verb-ing	I was walking home.
Completed event	Past simple	It started to rain.
Together	Background + event	I was cooking when Jo called.

When: I was cooking when the phone rang.

While: While I was cooking, my brother was setting the table.

Choose by meaning, not just the joining word: **When I got home, I made dinner.**

A. CHOOSE

Circle the correct form. The example answer is bold: I was reading when the phone **rang** / was ringing.

1. I watched / was watching TV when the lights went out.

3. We were having / had lunch when Ben called.

5. He was cooking while I washed / was washing up.

7. What did / were you doing when I called?

2. While she was walking, she found / was finding a key.

4. When I got home, I made / was making a sandwich.

6. She dropped / was dropping her phone while she was running.

8. I didn't hear you. I listened / was listening to music.

Read each answer aloud. Check the subject, the noun or the clue.

PAST SIMPLE OR PAST CONTINUOUS

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Use it | Complete a context, write sentences and speak with a partner.

B. COMPLETE: A wet afternoon

Use the past simple or past continuous. Write the complete missing verb form.

Mia: Why are your shoes so wet?

Ben: I (1) _____ (walk) home when it (2) _____ (start) to rain.

Mia: Oh no. Did you have an umbrella?

Ben: No. While I (3) _____ (wait) under a tree, a bus (4) _____
(stop).

Mia: That was lucky!

Ben: Yes. I (5) _____ (get) on. My sister (6) _____ (sit) at the back!

C. CHANGE THE SENTENCES

1-2: Show an action in progress and a single event. Change the underlined form.

Example: I walked home when I saw Jo. **I was walking home when I saw Jo.**

1. I was cooking when the phone was ringing.

2. She slept when the alarm rang.

3-4: Join the sentences using the word in brackets. Example: I was reading. Ben called. (when) **I was reading when Ben called.**

3. We were talking. The bus arrived. (when)

4. I was studying. My sister was reading. (while)

D. WRITE ABOUT YOU

Write a short, three-sentence story. Include an action in progress and a completed event.

Example: **I was walking home. I saw a friend. We stopped for a chat.**

E. SPEAK WITH A PARTNER

1. Tell your partner about a surprise or a small problem. Say what you were doing.

2. Build a story together: **I was waiting for a bus when ...**

Take turns adding events and background details.

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Answer key | Keep this page separate during student practice.

1. READ: A surprise at the station

Sample target language from the conversation:

Dan: Funny, actually. I **was waiting** for my train when I **saw** my old teacher.

Amy: Really? What **was** she **doing** there?

Dan: She **was buying** a ticket. I **called** her name, but she didn't hear me.

Dan: Yes. While we **were chatting**, my train **arrived**. We exchanged numbers.

A. CHOOSE

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|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. was watching | 2. found |
| 3. were having | 4. made |
| 5. was washing | 6. dropped |
| 7. were | 8. was listening |

B. COMPLETE: A wet afternoon

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. was walking | 2. started |
| 3. was waiting | 4. stopped |
| 5. got | 6. was sitting |

C. CHANGE THE SENTENCES

1. I was cooking when the phone rang.
2. She was sleeping when the alarm rang.
3. We were talking when the bus arrived.
4. I was studying while my sister was reading.

D. WRITE ABOUT YOU / E. SPEAK

Personal answers will vary. Check the target grammar.

Sample: I was walking home. I saw a friend. We stopped for a chat.

Teacher note: Tense choices can change meaning. The key models the intended background/event reading. In C1-2, change the underlined form to show background or a single event; the original can be grammatical with another meaning. Accept equivalent joined sentences in C3-4.