

# PAST SIMPLE & PAST CONTINUOUS

B1 | Teens / Adults | Grammar Practice | 35-45 minutes

Learn and practise | Describe events and what was happening around them.

## 1. READ: An unexpected visitor

Read the conversation. Notice the background actions and completed events.

**Ella:** You missed the best part of the meeting yesterday.

**Tom:** What happened?

**Ella:** We **were discussing** the budget when a cat **walked** in.

**Tom:** A cat? Where did it come from?

**Ella:** No idea. While Ben **was explaining** his figures, it **jumped** onto his laptop.

**Tom:** I bet that got everyone's attention!

## 2. GRAMMAR: Background actions and main events

Past continuous: actions in progress. Past simple: completed events and sequences.

| Meaning         | Form                      | Example                |
|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| In progress     | was/were + verb-ing       | We were discussing it. |
| Completed event | past simple               | The cat walked in.     |
| Question        | was/were + subject + -ing | Were you working?      |

**Together:** I was cooking when the phone rang.

**Two ongoing actions:** While I was cooking, Jo was setting the table.

When and while do not choose the tense automatically: consider the action.

## A. CHOOSE

Circle the correct form. The example answer is bold: At nine, I **was sleeping** / slept.

1. We waited / were waiting when the bus arrived.
2. She opened / was opening the door and went in.
3. At 8 p.m., they watched / were watching a film.
4. He was cooking when he heard / was hearing a crash.
5. While I was reading, Jo worked / was working.
6. What did / were you doing at six?
7. I dropped / was dropping my keys on the way home.
8. They weren't / didn't listening when I spoke.

Read each answer aloud. Explain which meaning or time clue helped you.

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

## B. COMPLETE: A power cut

Use the past simple or past continuous. Write the full verb form.

1. At eight last night, we \_\_\_\_\_ (watch) a film.
2. Suddenly, all the lights \_\_\_\_\_ (go) out.
3. Dad \_\_\_\_\_ (look) for a torch when I called him.
4. While he was searching, I \_\_\_\_\_ (wait) by the door.
5. He \_\_\_\_\_ (find) the torch in a drawer.
6. We \_\_\_\_\_ (sit) in the dark when the power came back.

## C. CHANGE THE SENTENCES

1-2: Join the sentences using the word in brackets.

Example: I was eating. Jo called. (when) **I was eating when Jo called.**

1. We were walking. It started to rain. (when) \_\_\_\_\_
2. I was cooking. Dan was washing up. (while) \_\_\_\_\_

3-4: Make questions. Example: You were sleeping. **Were you sleeping?**

3. She was waiting outside. \_\_\_\_\_
4. They heard the alarm. \_\_\_\_\_

## D. WRITE ABOUT YOU

Write three sentences about a memorable day. Include a background action and a main event.

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

## E. SPEAK WITH A PARTNER

Tell your partner what happened. Ask: **Where were you? / What were you doing?**

Ask a follow-up question about the next event.

Retell your partner's story in two or three sentences.

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Answer key | Keep this page separate during student practice.

## 1. READ: An unexpected visitor

Sample target language from the conversation:

**Ella:** We **were discussing** the budget when a cat **walked** in.

**Ella:** No idea. While Ben **was explaining** his figures, it **jumped** onto his laptop.

## A. CHOOSE

- |                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| 1. waited / were waiting   | 2. opened  |
| 3. watched / were watching | 4. heard   |
| 5. worked / was working    | 6. were    |
| 7. dropped                 | 8. weren't |

## B. COMPLETE: A power cut

- |                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. watched / were watching | 2. went                 |
| 3. was looking             | 4. waited / was waiting |
| 5. found                   | 6. were sitting         |

## C. CHANGE THE SENTENCES

1. We were walking when it started to rain.
2. While I was cooking, Dan was washing up. / I was cooking while Dan was washing up.
3. Was she waiting outside?
4. Did they hear the alarm?

## D. WRITE ABOUT YOU / E. SPEAK

Personal answers will vary. Check the target grammar.

**Sample:** I was sitting on a train when someone called my name. It was a friend from school. We talked until my stop.

**Teacher note:** A1/A3/A5 and B1/B4 allow both aspects. Continuous highlights an action in progress; simple presents an event as a whole. Accept alternative clause order in C.