

PAST PROGRESSIVE FOR INTERRUPTED ACTIONS IN THE PAST

Past Continuous Uses

Use 1: Interrupted Action in the Past



Use the past continuous to indicate that a longer action in the past was interrupted. The interruption is usually a shorter action in the simple past. Remember this can be a real interruption or just an interruption in time.

Examples:

- I **was watching** TV when she called.
- When the phone rang, she **was writing** a letter.
- While we **were having** the picnic, it started to rain.
- What **were you doing** when the earthquake started?
- I **was listening** to my iPod, so I didn't hear the fire alarm.
- You **were not listening** to me when I told you to turn the oven off.
- While John **was sleeping** last night, someone stole his car.
- Sammy **was waiting** for us when we got off the plane.
- While I **was writing** the email, the computer suddenly went off.
- A: What **were you doing** when you broke your leg?
- B: I **was snowboarding**.

Use 2: Specific Time as an Interruption



In Use 1, described above, the past continuous is interrupted by a shorter action in the simple past. However, you can also use a specific time as an interruption.

Examples:

- Last night at 6 pm, I **was eating** dinner.
- At midnight, we **were** still **driving** through the desert.
- Yesterday at this time, I **was sitting** at my desk at work.

IMPORTANT

In the simple past, a specific time is used to show when an action began or finished. In the past continuous, a specific time only interrupts the action.

Examples:

- Last night at 6 pm, I ate dinner.
- I started eating at 6 pm.
- Last night at 6 pm, I was eating dinner.
- I started earlier; and at 6 pm, I was in the process of eating dinner.

Reference:

Englishpage (s.f.). Past Continuous. Retrieved from:
<https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/pastcontinuous.html>

