

SIMPLE PAST AND PAST PROGRESSIVE TO DESCRIBE EVENTS

Functions of the past continuous

The past continuous describes actions or events in a time **before now**, which began in the past and were **still going on** when another event occurred.

It is used:

- Often, to describe the background in a story written in the past tense, e.g. "The sun **was shining** and the birds **were singing** as the elephant came out of the jungle. The other animals **were relaxing** in the shade of the trees, but the elephant moved very quickly. She **was looking** for her baby, and she didn't notice the hunter who **was watching** her through his binoculars. When the shot rang out, she **was running** towards the river..."
- To describe an unfinished action that was interrupted by another event or action, e.g. "I **was having** a beautiful dream when the alarm clock rang."
- To express a change of mind: e.g. "I **was going** to spend the day at the beach but I've decided to get my homework done instead."
- With '*wonder*', to make a very polite request: e.g. "I **was wondering** if you could baby-sit for me tonight."

Examples

- They were waiting for the bus when the accident happened.
- Caroline was skiing when she broke her leg.
- When we arrived, he was having a bath.
- When the fire started, I was watching television.

Note: with verbs not normally used in the continuous form, the simple past is used.

Reference:

EF (s.f.). Past continuous tense.

Retrieved from: <https://www.ef.com/wwen/english-resources/english-grammar/past-continuous-tense/>