

Simple Past vs Past Continuous Exercises

Level: A2, B1

Simple past or past continuous?

The past continuous (was/were + -ing) sets the scene with an action in progress; the simple past reports the shorter action that happened — or interrupted it.

Past continuous: was/were + -ing: At 8 p.m. I was cooking dinner.

Simple past: completed actions: The phone rang.

Interruption pattern: While I was cooking, the phone rang. (long action + short action)

Parallel actions: While I was cooking, he was setting the table.

Signal words: while, as + continuous; when + simple past

Exercise 1: Choose the correct tense

Select the correct option to complete each sentence.

1. I ___ a shower when the doorbell rang.
a) took b) was taking c) am taking
2. She ___ her coffee, paid, and left the café.
a) was finishing b) finished c) finishes
3. What ___ you ___ at 10 o'clock last night?
a) did / do b) were / doing c) have / done
4. While we ___ in the garden, it suddenly started to rain.
a) were sitting b) sat c) sit
5. He ___ his leg while he was playing football.
a) was breaking b) broke c) breaks

Exercise 2: Complete the sentences

Type the correct past form of the verb in brackets (simple past or past continuous).

6. When you called, I ___ TV. (watch)
7. The children ___ in the park when it began to snow. (play)
8. She ___ the letter, put it in an envelope, and posted it. (sign)
9. While I ___ to work, I saw an accident. (drive)
10. They ___ dinner at 8, so I didn't want to disturb them. (have)

Exercise 3: Put the words in order

Click the words in the correct order to build the sentence.

11. Put the words in the correct order: **was / when / raining / it / we arrived**

12. Put the words in the correct order: **while / was sleeping / the baby / she / worked**

13. Put the words in the correct order: **were / at 9 p.m. / what / doing / you / ?**

14. Put the words in the correct order: **fell / he / was running / while / he**

Exercise 4: True or false?

Decide if each statement is true or false.

15. The past continuous is formed with was/were + verb-ing. True / False

16. In "While I was cooking, the phone rang", the phone call lasted longer than the cooking. True / False

17. Two parallel past actions can both use the past continuous with 'while'. True / False

18. "I was knowing the answer" is correct. True / False

Answer key

Exercise 1: Choose the correct tense

1. b) was taking
2. b) finished
3. b) were / doing
4. a) were sitting
5. b) broke

Exercise 2: Complete the sentences

6. was watching
7. were playing
8. signed
9. was driving
10. were having

Exercise 3: Put the words in order

11. it was raining when we arrived
12. she worked while the baby was sleeping
13. what were you doing at 9 p.m. ?
14. he fell while he was running

Exercise 4: True or false?

15. True
16. False
17. True
18. False