Simple Past vs Past Continuous Exercises

Level: A2, B1

Name: _____ Date: _____

Simple past or past continuous?

The past continuous (was/were + -ing) sets the scene with an action in progress; the simple past tells the short action that happened in the middle of it.

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

Simple past: finished actions: The phone rang.

Short action in a long one: While I was cooking, the phone rang. (long action + short action)

Two actions at the same time: While I was cooking, he was setting the table.

Clue words: Often, while or as introduces the continuous action and when introduces the simple past event; context decides.

Exercise 1: Choose the correct tense

Select the correct option to complete each sentence.

1. I ___ a shower when the phone rang, so I didn't answer.
   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) are / doing b) were / doing c) did / done
4. While we ___ in the garden, it suddenly started to rain.
   a) were sitting b) are sitting 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. Sorry, I didn't hear the phone. I ___ TV. (watch)
7. The children ___ in the park when it began to snow. (play)
8. She ___ the door, put on her coat, and left the house. (open)
9. While I ___ to work, I saw an accident. (drive)
10. I called at 8, but they couldn't talk. They ___ dinner. (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 / what / you / doing at 9 p.m. / ?**

    _____

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", was the phone ringing the longer action? True / False
17. Two actions at the same time in the past 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. opened
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

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