Subject: economic English

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Level: MASTER 2 / 1

Department of Economics

**Grammar:** Past simple vs Past continuous

* The past continuous – Use

Actions in progress

We use the past continuous to talk about **actions** that were **in progress** (not finished) at a specific moment **in the past**.

* + *‘What****were****you****doing****at 9?’ ‘I****was studying****.’*
  + *When I saw them yesterday, they****were arguing****.*

The specific moment in the past can be described by a **time expression** (at 9 a.m., at midday, at lunchtime, all morning, all day, etc.):

* + *They were swimming****at 7 in the morning****.*
  + ***At midday****, they were still working.*

Or by a **simple past sentence**:

* + *They were swimming****when I saw them****.*
  + ***When she arrived****, they were still working.*

Describing a scene

We often use the past continuous at the beginning of a story to describe the situation.

* + *It****was getting****dark, and I****was walking****fast. Suddenly …*

Past simple vs Past continuous

We use the [**past simple**](https://test-english.com/grammar-points/a2/past-simple-form-use/) for **completed actions in the past**, and we use the past continuous for **actions in progress** (not finished) in the past.

* + *We****ate out****yesterday.* (the action is finished)
  + *We****were eating****at 9.* (the action was not finished)

The past continuous describes a longer action or situation, and the past simple describes a shorter action or event.

* + *When I****met****Susan, she****was having****a drink at a terrace with a friend.*
  + *We****didn’t go out****because it****was raining****.*

The short action in past simple often interrupts the longer action in past continuous.

* + *He****was playing****football when he****broke****his arm.*
  + *When I****went****to bed, it****was raining****.*

We use the past simple for completed actions that happened one after the other. Compare:

* + - *When he****arrived****, she****was having****a shower.*(The action of having a shower started **before** he arrived)
    - *When he****arrived****, she****had****a shower.*(The action of having a shower started **after** he arrived)

[E-Mail](mailto:?subject=Past%20continuous%20and%20past%20simple%20-%20Improve%20your%20English%20skills:%20grammar,%20listening,%20reading,%20writing.&body=%0D%0Ahttps://test-english.com/grammar-points/a2/past-continuous-past-simple/%0D%0AThis%20is%20a%20resource%20from%20test-english.com." \t "_self)

##### Activity : Choose the correct past continuous and past simple forms to complete the sentences below.

Top of Form

* **1**I fell down down while I was going down the stairs.
* **2**He was driving very fast when he had the accident.
* **3**It was snowing when we  left home.
* **4**I didn't answer your call because I was working.
* **5**This morning I got up and I made breakfast for everybody.
* **6**When I saw her, she was wearing a really nice purple dress.
* **8**I didn't say hello because you were walking very fast.
* **9**I was sleeping happily when a loud noise woke me up

