

10 The past continuous

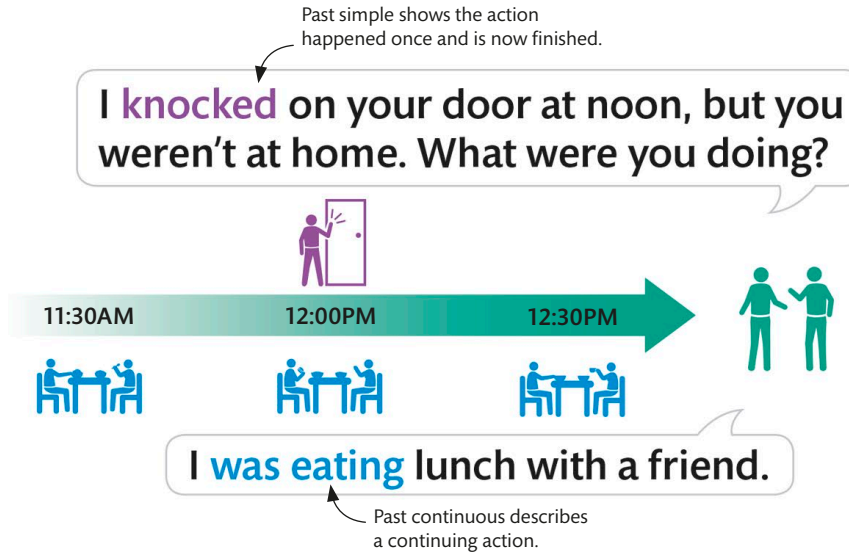
The past continuous is used in English to talk about actions or events that were in progress at some time in the past. It is formed with "was" or "were" and a present participle.

See also:
Past simple 7
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10.1 THE PAST CONTINUOUS

English uses the past continuous to talk about ongoing actions that were in progress at a certain time in the past.

The past continuous shows the action went on for some time, but is now finished.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

This time last week, **we were hiking** in Peru.



He didn't go out because **he was working** late.



When I lost my camera, **we were swimming** in the sea.

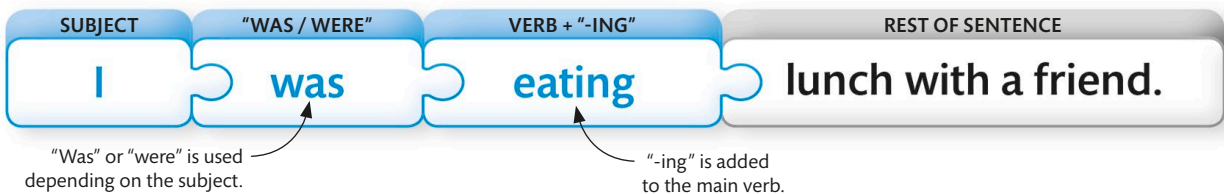


The last time I saw him, **he was washing** his car.



HOW TO FORM

"Was" or "were" followed by the present participle form the past continuous.



10.2 THE PAST CONTINUOUS FOR SCENE-SETTING

The past continuous is often used in storytelling to set a scene or describe a situation.



It was a beautiful day.
The sun **was shining** and the birds **were singing**.
Children **were laughing** and **playing** in the street.

10.3 THE PAST CONTINUOUS AND THE PAST SIMPLE

When English uses the past continuous and past simple together, the past continuous describes a longer, background action, and the past simple describes a shorter action that interrupts the background action.

CONTINUING BACKGROUND ACTION

INTERRUPTING MAIN ACTION

I **was taking** a photo when **a monkey grabbed** my camera.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

He **was sunbathing** when **it started** to rain.

She **was sleeping** when **the phone rang**.



I **was mowing** the lawn when **you called**.

I **was having** a bath when **you knocked**.

