


The Use of Past Continuous

The Past Continuous has **4 main uses/functions**:


Use 1 – an interrupted action in the past

Here the Past Continuous is used to indicate a long action that was interrupted. Usually, the action that interrupts the long action is the Past Simple.

<p><i>I was studying when Danny called me.</i></p> <p><i>She was answering an important e-mail when I interrupted her.</i></p> <p><i>John was waiting for us when we got off the train.</i></p>	<p>Past Simple: ... when Danny called me.</p>  <p>Past Continuous: I was studying ...</p>
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Use 2 – parallel actions

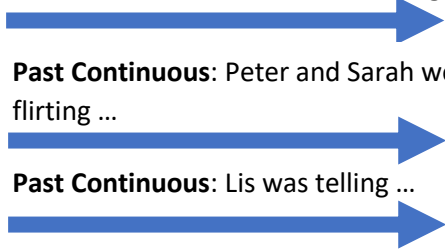
The Past Continuous is used to indicate that two actions were happening at the same time; hence parallel actions.

<p><i>I was watching TV while the children were playing outside.</i></p> <p><i>What were they doing while you were working?</i></p> <p><i>We were discussing the new project and having a good time as well.</i></p>	<p>Past Continuous: I was watching TV</p>  <p>Past Continuous: ... the children were playing outside.</p>
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Less important uses:


Use 3 – describing a mood/atmosphere

We can use the Past Continuous to describe **several actions happening at the same time** to describe the atmosphere or situation before or as a main action occurs.

<p><i>Chris was chatting to the barman with his usual pint. Peter and Sarah were flirting with each other, and Liz was telling the rest of the gang one of her outrageous stories about when she was an actress in the West End.</i></p>	<p>Past Continuous: Chris was chatting ...</p>  <p>Past Continuous: Peter and Sarah were flirting ...</p> <p>Past Continuous: Lis was telling ...</p>
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Use 4 – repetition – irritation with 'always' and 'constantly'

The Past Continuous with words such as '**always**' or '**constantly**' indicates something repeated or irritating. Words like 'always' should be placed between the auxiliary 'be' and the present participle.

<p><i>She was always coming late for meetings.</i></p> <p><i>I was constantly misplacing my glasses</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">always / constantly</p>  <p>Past Continuous: She was always late for meetings.</p>
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<https://www.ecenglish.com/learnenglish/lessons/advanced-level-past-continuous-tense>